

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Television and the Cultural Revolution: the BBC under Hugh Carleton Greene

Thesis

How to cite:

Waymark, Peter Astley Grosvenor (2006). Television and the Cultural Revolution: the BBC under Hugh Carleton Greene. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2006 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000e96a>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Television and the Cultural Revolution: the BBC under Hugh Carleton Greene

Peter Astley Grosvenor Waymark BSc (Econ), BA, MA

Thesis presented for the degree of PhD, Department of History, Open University

October 2005

AUTHOR NO M256717X

DATE OF SUBMISSION 26 OCTOBER 2005

DATE OF AWARD 07 MARCH 2006

CONTENTS

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
I. Prelude to Greene: Conservatism and Change in the 1950s	13
II. Greene and the Institutional Framework	
1. The Greene Factor and the Processes of Change	32
2. A Force For Stability: BBC Television Management	41
3. A Fragile Harmony: Greene and the Governors	55
4. The BBC and the Pilkington Report	66
III. Sites of Innovation and Controversy	
1. A Creative Treatment of Reality: Russell and Watkins	79
2. Plays of Today: <i>Z Cars</i> and <i>The Wednesday Play</i>	110
3. Mocking Convention: <i>That Was the Week That Was</i>	143
4. Rantings of a Working-Class Bigot: <i>Till Death Us Do Part</i>	164
IV. ... Plus C'est la Meme Chose	
1. Questions of Colour: <i>The Black and White Minstrel Show</i>	181
2. Deferring to Tradition: The BBC and the Monarchy	196
V. Pressures From Without	
1. Mary Whitehouse and the 'New Morality'	212
2. Harold Wilson and the Broadcasting of Politics	229
VI. Playing Safe? Lord Hill and the BBC After Greene	252
Conclusion	262
Bibliography	265

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH SCHOOL
Library Authorisation Form

Please return this form to the Research School with the two bound copies of your thesis to be deposited with the University Library. All candidates should complete parts one and two of the form. Part three only applies to PhD candidates.

Part One: Candidates Details

Name: PETER A.G. WAYMARK PI: M256717X
Degree: PHD
Thesis title: TELEVISION AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION :
THE BBC UNDER HUGH CARLETON GREENE

Part Two: Open University Library Authorisation

I confirm that I am willing for my thesis to be made available to readers by the Open University Library, and that it may be photocopied, subject to the discretion of the Librarian.

Signed: AG Waymark Date: 18.4.2006

Part Three: British Library Authorisation [PhD candidates only]

If you want a copy of your PhD thesis to be available on loan to the British Library Thesis Service as and when it is requested, you must sign a British Library Doctoral Thesis Agreement Form. Please return it to the Research School with this form. The British Library will publicise the details of your thesis and may request a copy on loan from the University Library. Information on the presentation of the thesis is given in the Agreement Form.

Please note the British Library have requested that theses should be printed on one side only to enable them to produce a clear microfilm. The Open University Library sends the fully bound copy of theses to the British Library.

The University has agreed that your participation in the British Library Thesis Service should be voluntary. Please tick either (a) or (b) to indicate your intentions.

☒ I am willing for the Open University to loan the British Library a copy of my thesis.
A signed Agreement Form is attached

☐ I do not wish the Open University to loan the British Library a copy of my thesis.

Signed: AG Waymark Date: 18.4.2006

ABSTRACT

Historians have argued that from the late 1950s Britain underwent a ‘cultural revolution’, a fundamental and lasting change in attitudes and beliefs which saw a questioning of established authority and institutions and a liberalisation of social controls in areas such as censorship, abortion and homosexuality. Few areas of cultural production were left untouched but while there has been scholarly work on the ‘new’ drama and ‘new wave’ cinema, the role of television has been largely ignored in academic writing. This thesis attempts to fill the gap. Although there is an assessment of the degree to which the BBC was responding to changes in society before the 1960s, the focus is on the Director-Generalship of Hugh Carleton Greene (1960-69) which has become associated with encouraging more liberal attitudes within the corporation. The extent of Greene’s own contribution is one of the themes. The approach is that of the empiricist historian, starting from evidence rather than theory, and the thesis is largely based on primary material from the BBC’s Written Archives, the National Archives and personal papers. Case studies of programmes such as *That Was the Week That Was*, *The War Game*, *Up the Junction* and *Till Death Us Do Part* highlight the challenges they posed to BBC practice and how these were negotiated. There is an examination of areas resistant to change, such as *The Black and White Minstrel Show* and the BBC’s coverage of the monarchy, and of relations between the BBC and two of its strongest critics, Mary Whitehouse on morality and Harold Wilson on politics. Overall the thesis seeks to show how and to what extent the BBC responded to the cultural revolution and to assess the degree to which the corporation’s policies and practices changed in the process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most of the original research for this thesis was carried out at the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham, near Reading. Indeed the project would have been impossible without the material which the centre provided. The hazards of more than 50 journeys to Caversham, involving three trains and a bus, were more than offset by the pleasure of working in such a friendly and intimate atmosphere. I would like particularly to thank the archivists who looked after me so well and met my sometimes awkward requests with unfailing courtesy: Karen White initially and then, for most of the time, James Codd, the Deputy Archivist. I was also welcomed, and given the maximum of assistance, at the Albert Sloman Library, University of Essex, and the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, and would like to thank Robert Butler, Librarian at the former, and Helen Langley and Colin Harris at the latter. I am also grateful to the staff of the British Film Institute, especially for arranging viewings of programmes and making available the BECTU history interviews.

My debt to the Open University, under whose aegis this project was carried out, goes back many years. I first studied with the OU in 1987 and developed a growing admiration for the professionalism of its teaching, not least in my main fields of interest, history and popular culture, as I proceeded to a BA and then an MA. I would not have wanted to do a PhD anywhere else and I was delighted when the History Department accepted my proposal. I have enjoyed the happiest possible relationships with my principal supervisor, Dr James Chapman, and my other supervisor, Dr Anthony Aldgate. I had known both from their writings, and admired their combination of academic rigour, clarity of expression and refreshing lack of jargon. I have done my best to follow their example. They could not have been more encouraging.

Finally but not least I would like to thank my family for their love and support. Having done a PhD herself, my wife Janet was able to help and guide me from experience. I often consulted her thesis to see how it is done. My son, Chris, and daughter, Nicky, also have higher degrees and know what is involved. Moreover, and very importantly, both gave me the benefit of their computer skills, without which I would have floundered on many occasions.

INTRODUCTION

Historians have argued that during the 1960s, or, perhaps more usefully from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, Britain underwent a ‘cultural revolution’. Using ‘culture’ in its broadest sense to cover not only artistic practices, ‘high’ and ‘popular’, but also attitudes and beliefs, the proposition is that the changes in these areas were radical and lasting. The revolution was led, to a significant extent, by affluent and assertive young people, whether working-class pop singers or Oxbridge-educated satirists, writers and directors. Social controls were swept away in the relaxation of literary, stage and cinema censorship and the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality. Few areas of cultural output were left untouched. There was a ‘new’ British drama and a ‘new wave’ cinema.¹ Television was also at the centre of cultural change and it reached far bigger audiences than theatre or cinema.² Yet its contribution has been largely ignored. Arthur Marwick’s study of the decade devotes some 50 of its 900 pages to the cinema but hardly touches on television. The BBC gets just two brief mentions.³

During the 1960s BBC television, under the Director-Generalship of Hugh Greene, pushed out the boundaries of acceptability and taste. *Z Cars* overturned the conventions of the police series and the *Wednesday Play* strand offered a platform for young writers to tackle contemporary life and issues. The satire movement, with its questioning of established institutions and beliefs, found its television expression with *That Was the Week That Was*. Ken Russell in *Monitor* and Peter Watkins, with *Culloden* and *The War Game*, challenged traditional notions of documentary. *Till Death Us Do Part* used the conventions of situation comedy to explore race prejudice. Although he did not initiate any of these programmes, Greene is credited with creating the climate which made them possible. According to the critic Milton Shulman, Greene ‘helped to push the BBC right into the centre of the swirling forces that were changing life in Britain’. Moreover, ‘the BBC was not merely reflecting and recording these changes but helping to agitate them as well’.⁴

This thesis will examine how the cultural revolution was represented in BBC programmes and how, in the process, the BBC itself changed. The emphasis will be on the BBC and not ITV for three reasons. One is to keep the project to a manageable

the BBC and not ITV for three reasons. One is to keep the project to a manageable length. Secondly, while ITV was not as trivial in its programming as the Pilkington Report (1962) made out, on the whole it trod a more cautious and populist path than the BBC and did not arouse the same strength of feeling. Mary Whitehouse, for instance, saw Greene and the BBC as the devil and rarely criticised ITV. Thirdly, while the BBC has a written archive open to researchers, there is no equivalent for the ITV companies.

Academic work on the BBC in the 1960s has tended to focus on specific aspects, rather than examine the period as a whole. In *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green* Susan Sydney-Smith reworked her doctoral thesis on the television police series.⁵ The *Wednesday Play* has been the subject of a research project at Reading University, fruits of which have been published by M. K. MacMurrough-Kavanagh.⁶ There has been a considerable literature about the BBC's motives for not showing *The War Game*.⁷ Michael Tracey and David Morrison used the archives of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association for a study of Mary Whitehouse.⁸ The biographies of Hugh Greene and Huw Wheldon both draw on private papers, but neither contains references.⁹ The fifth volume of Asa Briggs's *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* is the broadest general treatment and it uses archival material. But it is more concerned with setting down the record than constructing an argument. Briggs calls it 'a work of reference for people inside the BBC as well as for scholars outside it' and hopes that it will point the way to further studies.¹⁰

The focus of this study will be the BBC under the Director-Generalship of Greene, which began on 1 January 1960, and continued until his retirement at the end of March 1969. Bar a few months, the Greene era coincides exactly with the decade. Moreover, the programmes which are usually taken as groundbreaking date from the early to middle 1960s. In other areas the cultural revolution was under way well before the 1960s. The 'new' drama is often dated from *Look Back In Anger* (first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in May 1956) and the 'new wave' cinema from *Room At the Top* (released in January 1959). Christopher Booker goes back even further into the 1950s to pinpoint the start of the 'revolution in English life'.¹¹ But if the BBC was late in joining that revolution, it must not be assumed that nothing much changed before January 1960, and everything afterwards when Greene sought to 'open the windows

and dissipate some of the ivory tower stuffiness which still clung to some parts of the BBC'.¹² There were innovative programmes in the 1950s, notably *Tonight*, while several young executives who were to be at the forefront of change in the 1960s (Donald Baverstock, Alasdair Milne, Michael Peacock) had been recruited during the previous decade.

Among the Director-Generals of the BBC Greene is second only to John Reith in popular reputation. He stamped his personality on the job to an extent that, arguably, none of his successors has done. But while giving proper weight to Greene's role and outlook, the thesis will seek to set the Director-General in the larger context. Above him are the governors, who appoint him, can call him to account and can remove him. Below him are executives responsible for television output and below them the producers who commission the programmes. Below them are the writers, directors and performers who create programmes. Briggs has been criticised for writing the history of the BBC 'from above', concentrating on decision-making at the top to the exclusion of programme-making 'from below'.¹³ This study will attempt to correct the balance.

Whatever the nature or impact of the cultural revolution in the BBC, it did not go uncontested, even within the corporation. Greene has the reputation, which he did much to foster, of being a 'liberal' Director-General. Yet he took *That Was the Week That Was* off the air before its scheduled end, banned *The War Game* and was nervous about the amount of violence on television. Moreover, all new projects went through a series of checks, as part of the BBC's system of 'upward reference'. Programmes such as *That Was the Week That Was* and *Till Death Us Do Part* may have seemed to the BBC's critics to be evidence that the corporation was out of control but they did not reach the screen unmediated.

The extent of the cultural revolution must be further qualified. Just as in the London theatre murder mysteries and drawing room comedies continued to flourish in the wake of *Look Back in Anger*, and social realism was by no means the only strand in the British cinema, so much of the BBC's output during the 1960s remained conventional. To assess how far this was so this study will look at *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, which started in the 1950s, ran through into the 1970s, and was defended by the BBC against criticism that it demeaned black people. The tension between tradition and change will be further explored through the BBC's coverage of

the monarchy.

The approach is that of the empiricist historian, of using archival research to gather evidence and draw conclusions from it. Academic work on the media, including television, has tended to divide into 'history' and 'studies'. The dividing line is not absolute, and television studies itself offers a number of approaches.¹⁴ One is a concentration on the 'text', and how its meaning is produced by the formal qualities of sound and image. Another is sociological, looking at television as an institution and its relationship to audiences. In general television studies starts from theory, rather than evidence, and seeks to use models and concepts as analytical tools. Rather than limit themselves to the text, historians prefer to put the emphasis on 'context', how, for instance, a television programme is produced and received, and to use it as a primary source for what it says about contemporary society.¹⁵ While some historians employ theory, empiricists argue that such an approach can be too rigid and fail to account for the complexities of specific events. Again, while sociologists tend to study society at specific moments, the job of historians is to explain change through time.

In television much has been written in the 'studies' mode and much less on 'history'. This thesis will attempt to make a contribution to television history and in particular to examine individual programmes in terms of production, reception and ideology. Whether television merely holds up a mirror to society, or connects with it in a more subtle and complex way, will be one aspect of such analysis. A further criticism of Briggs is that he fails to relate television programmes to wider cultural change.¹⁶ This thesis will try to do so.

Even avowed empiricists do not reject theory completely. Jeffrey Richards, while offering a 'historical, contextual' approach to British cinema in the 1930s, draws on the neo-Marxist hegemony theory of the Italian politician and writer, Antonio Gramsci, to argue for the 'consensual' message of much film output.¹⁷ Rejecting the reductionist Marxist view that the dominant ideas, beliefs and values of a society are imposed by the ruling class 'from above', Gramsci suggested that the ruling class maintains its position over the subordinate class through a process of negotiation and concession which generates consent. Gramscian hegemony theory has also been used to explain concessions to popular taste in BBC radio output during the Second World War.¹⁸

Theory can offer useful insights but the guiding principle of this thesis is that the evidence comes first.

One reason why television history has been slower to develop as a discipline than television studies is that the principal source of primary evidence for the BBC, the Written Archives Centre at Caversham near Reading, has operated a rough 25-year rule on public access. Research into the 1960s would have been impossible before the mid-1990s. Although, inevitably, its holdings are fragmentary and incomplete, and are vetted before being released to researchers, the Written Archives Centre offers such essential material as files on individual programmes, writers and performers and aspects of BBC policy; minutes of Board of Governors and management meetings; and audience research reports. This project also draws on primary material in The National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) for relations between the BBC and government, the papers of Harold Wilson at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the archives of the National Listeners' and Viewers' Association at the University of Essex .

In assessing how programmes were received one useful guide is BBC audience research. This began in 1936 and by the 1960s was of two kinds. The first was an attempt to discover how many people watched a particular programme. To obtain this information the BBC interviewed a representative sample of viewers. The other tried to discover the degree of audience satisfaction with a programme, expressed as a 'reaction index', through information gathered from questionnaires. Independent television during this period used a different system, TAM (Television Audience Measurement), which counted not viewers but numbers of sets switched on for a particular programme. Neither method was perfect and the two could produce very different results, with TAM generally working in ITV's favour. The findings of television audience research must be interpreted with care.

A further primary source is oral history. The BBC Sound Archives Oral History Project comprises interviews with key figures in BBC history such as Ian Jacob, Hugh Greene and Huw Wheldon. This thesis also draws on interviews conducted for the BECTU History Project, an initiative by the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union. Memories can be selective (deliberately or otherwise), coloured by hindsight and fallible. Oral accounts have to be checked as far as possible with evidence from the period. But they can give a sense of what it was like

working at the BBC and fill gaps in the documents.

Trying to watch programmes from the 1960s can be difficult as much of the material was wiped. Videotape was then very expensive and there was pressure to reuse it. Also, much television was regarded as ephemeral and not worth preserving. Even landmark series such as *Till Death Us Do Part* are missing many episodes, though previously 'lost' programmes are coming to light from private collectors and from abroad.¹⁹ The National Film and Television Archive (NFTVA) is the official repository for television footage but it relies on what companies, including the BBC, are prepared to give it and for cost reasons can make only a part of its collection available for viewing. However, BBC4, which began just in time for this project in 2002, regularly screens archive material which is not in the NFTVA collection. In the absence of footage, programmes can to an extent be reconstructed from scripts, which are usually available at Caversham.

The opening chapter examines BBC television in the 1950s, identifying the forces making for conservatism and change. It looks at the BBC's response to the arrival of ITV and assesses how far *Tonight* represented a new style and attitude. The second chapter examines the institutional context. It assesses the impact of Greene as Director-General, the roles of the Board of Governors and television management, and the BBC's pitch to the Pilkington Committee. There follows a series of case studies. The extent, and limitations, of cultural change are explored through programmes including *Z Cars*, *That Was the Week That Was*, *The War Game*, *Up the Junction* and *Till Death Us Do Part*. The aim is to address how radical these programmes were in television terms and, secondly, how they related to wider changes in social attitudes. These examples of innovation are offset by studies of *The Black and White Minstrel Show* and coverage of the monarchy. There are assessments of the challenges posed to the BBC by two prominent critics, Mary Whitehouse and Harold Wilson. The final question is whether the BBC negotiated change and assimilated it, conforming to the Gramscian model, or whether the corporation emerged from the 1960s as fundamentally different from the institution which Greene took over.

Notes

1. Stephen Lacey, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context* (London: Routledge, 1995); John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-63* (London: British Film Institute, 1986); Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992)
2. In 1963 total cinema admissions were 357 million, an average of just under 7 million a week; Alexander Walker, *Hollywood England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974), p 470. During the week ending 17 November 1963 the 20 most popular television programmes all had audiences of more than 11.25 million; BBC Audience Research.
3. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c 1958-c 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
4. Milton Shulman, *The Least Worst Television in the World* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), p 102.
5. Susan Sydney-Smith, *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).
6. M. K. MacMurrough-Kavanagh, 'The BBC and the Birth of "The Wednesday Play", 1962-66: Institutional Containment versus "Agitational Contemporaneity"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol 17 no 3 (1997), pp 367-81. "'Drama" into "News": Strategies of Intervention in "The Wednesday Play"', *Screen*, vol 38 no 3 (Autumn 1997), pp 247-259; 'Boys on Top: Gender and Authorship on the BBC Wednesday Play 1964-70', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 21 no 3 (1999), pp 409-25.
7. Patrick Murphy argues for a conspiracy between the BBC and the government in 'The War Game - The Controversy', *Film International* 3 (2003), pp 25-28. James Chapman comes to a different conclusion in 'The BBC and the Censorship of *The War Game* (1965)', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol 41 no 1 (January 2006), pp 75-94.
8. Michael Tracey and David E. Morrison, *Whitehouse* (London: Macmillan, 1979).
9. Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives, A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983); Paul Ferris, *Sir Huge: The Biography of Huw Wheldon* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990).

10. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol V - *Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p xvi.
11. Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Collins, 1969).
12. Hugh Greene, *The Third Floor Front: A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969), p 13.
13. Edward Buscombe, 'Broadcasting From Above', *Screen Education*, no 37, Winter 1980/81, pp 73-78; Raphael Samuel, 'London Calling; The BBC from Savoy Hill to Shepherd's Bush', *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 March 1996, p 14. The first is a review of Briggs, op cit., vol IV, the second a review of vol V.
14. See Jonathan Bignell, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004).
15. An example of this approach is Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present*, rev ed (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).
16. Buscombe, op cit.
17. Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p 2.
18. David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, 'Radio in World War II', Open University course U203, *Popular Culture* (1981), Unit 8.
19. Dick Fiddy, *Missing Believed Wiped: Searching for the Lost Treasures of British Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

I. PRELUDE TO GREENE: CONSERVATISM AND CHANGE IN THE 1950s

Introduction

Hugh Greene's assumption of the Director-Generalship of the BBC in January 1960 is often seen as marking the decisive shift from the conservatism of the 1950s to the more radical, irreverent and, some would say, permissive, 1960s. The 1950s in general, and the BBC during this period, have been characterised as cautious and complacent, though important changes in many areas of British life were well under way long before the decade was out. This chapter will seek to establish the the degree to which the BBC was still rooted in traditional values and how this was starting to change.

The first section will look at the BBC generally in relation to British society in the 1950s. The theme of conservatism and change will be further explored in a specifically television context. In the 1950s BBC television was engaged in a battle on two fronts. Competition from within came from radio, still the 'senior service' and, it will be argued, a generally stifling influence. Competition from without came with the arrival in 1955 of ITV and the BBC's response to the ending of its television monopoly reveals much about its attitudes to the medium and its strategies for managing change. Finally, the *Tonight* programme, which has been seen as going further than any in challenging traditional BBC attitudes, is the subject of a case study.

The BBC and the 1950s

Arthur Marwick has suggested that the 1950s have a number of key characteristics, including a 'rigid social hierarchy', 'repressed attitudes to sex', 'unquestioning respect for authority' and 'strict formalism in language, etiquette and dress codes'.¹ All can be seen in the BBC. During this period there was much discussion of the notion of the Establishment, based on a two-pronged proposition. First, the main centres of power and influence in Britain, politics, the civil service, the armed forces, the City and, not least the BBC, were dominated by people (in essence men) from a narrow social and educational background, upper class, public school and Oxbridge. Secondly, they used their power and influence to uphold the political, cultural and social status quo. The

journalist Henry Fairlie wrote of the BBC in 1959 that ‘it has done more than any other body to buttress the most conservative institutions in the country, to create and perpetuate reverence for the orders, the privileges and mysteries of a conservative society’.² Here are echoes of Marwick’s ‘rigid social hierarchy’ and ‘respect for authority’.

The hierarchy of the BBC starts with the governors. Stuart Hood, a BBC executive in the late 1950s and 1960s, claimed that ‘since the BBC began the governors have represented the views of the British ruling class in broadcasting’ and argued that ‘neither the inclusion of a few right-wing Labour figures, like Barbara Wootton [the economist], nor of the black cricketer Learie Constantine ... has had much effect on this’. Hood went on: ‘To suggest that such men and women represent the views and interests of the bulk of the British viewers would be ridiculous.’ Moreover, ‘a governing body with such a membership and such ideas on society, taste and on public morality (including censorship) is unlikely to guide the BBC ... along radical lines or to encourage programmes which might in any way endanger the present social system’.³ In 1958 the average age of the governors was over 60 and only one was not either a peer, a knight or a dame.⁴

The senior management of the BBC was also drawn from the same narrow social and educational background. Sir William Haley, Director-General from 1944 to 1952, was a notable exception, having left school at 16. But his attitudes, both while running the BBC and later as Editor of *The Times*, were strongly conservative. Sir Ian Jacob, who succeeded him, was from the upper middle class, the son of a field-marshal. Of the television executives of the 1950s, Gerald Beadle, the Managing Director of Television, and Kenneth Adam, his deputy and successor, were both public school and Cambridge educated, as was Leonard Miall, Head of Talks. Ronald Waldman and Eric Maschwitz, successive Heads of Light Entertainment, also went to public schools and Oxbridge. The backgrounds were similar at the programme level. Robert Rowland, who joined the BBC at the end of the 1950s observes that ‘*Panorama* [the current affairs series] was broadly run by the kind of person who, decades earlier, could have ended up as district commissioners in the British Empire. With a few exceptions, staff and reporters were ex-public schoolboys, many Oxbridge ...’⁵.

The lower middle-class and working-class figures prominent in the BBC in the 1950s were servants, not masters. In this category were comedians and popular singers, as well as writers such as Ray Galton and Alan Simpson. Galton, the son of a bus conductor, left school at 14. Simpson, whose father was a milkman, got to grammar school but left at 16.⁶ But such people had to negotiate, and to an extent conform with, the BBC culture. A strong impression left by Richard Cawston's documentary *This Is the BBC* (first televised 29 June 1960) is the preponderance of clipped and polished upper-class accents, even down to news editors and announcers. The only working-class accents heard in the film are those of women cleaners.

The BBC's coverage of politics and the monarchy illustrate its deference to authority and perpetration of traditional values. The BBC depended on government for its licence fee, and for the renewal of its Charter, and in dealing with politicians its instinct was to play safe. In May 1950 it launched a live discussion programme, *In the News*, which by October had a regular panel of four: W. J. Brown, a former Independent MP, Robert Boothby, a Conservative MP, Michael Foot, a Labour MP, and the left-leaning historian, A. J. P. Taylor. It could thus claim to be politically balanced. It was very popular, drawing half the viewing public, and as Grace Wyndham Goldie, Assistant Head of Talks, noted, 'matters in the news were discussed by intelligent men who seemed to be thinking independently, not merely mouthing the clichés of routine party politics'.⁷ But this very independence of thought was anathema to the political parties. Both Boothby and Foot were mavericks, frequently at odds with the official line. The two major parties made representations to the BBC to include MPs more representative of mainstream opinion. George Barnes, the Director of Television, gave in and the regular team was relegated to appearing once a month. Barnes succeeded in defusing controversy but made the programme tamer.⁸ To critics such as Hood, the episode was an example of the BBC perpetuating the political consensus and marginalising dissent. When ITV started the quartet reappeared in a programme pointedly entitled *Free Speech*.

If the BBC deferred to politicians in the 1950s, it did so even more to the monarchy. To an extent it was in tune with the times. There was little questioning of the institution and televised royal occasions, of which the 1953 Coronation was the most

spectacular example, were immensely popular across the social spectrum and conferred prestige on the BBC. Indeed, the BBC needed the royal family more than Buckingham Palace needed television and access to royal events was strictly controlled. When criticism of the monarchy did emerge, the BBC tried to distance itself from it. There was no question of opening up a debate and allowing critics and defenders to have an equal say, but rather something more akin to internal censorship. In August 1957 Lord Altrincham (later John Grigg) wrote an article in *National and English Review* suggesting that the monarchy had become complacent and hidebound and attacking the Queen for sounding like a priggish schoolgirl. The magazine had a tiny circulation but the article was taken up by the national press. While ITV gave the story full coverage, the BBC did not mention it.

Two months later when, during the Queen's visit to the United States, the *Saturday Evening Post* carried an article by Malcolm Muggeridge under the heading 'Does England really need a Queen?'. He was more critical of the monarchy than the monarch but still said she was a cause of snobbishness. Unlike Altrincham, Muggeridge was contracted to the BBC and a regular contributor to *Panorama*. The immediate reaction of Michael Peacock, producer of *Panorama*, was to stage a discussion on the monarchy and invite Muggeridge to take part. This was approved by Peacock's department head, Leonard Miall. But the item was cancelled on the instructions of Jacob. The official BBC explanation was that 'we felt we should be giving further publicity to a matter which has already had enough'.⁹

The BBC also withdrew an invitation to Altrincham to appear on the radio programme *Any Questions?* on 1 November 'as in the existing state of public feeling you are liable to find yourself drawn into a discussion similar to that which we cancelled yesterday in *Panorama*'.¹⁰ In December a radio broadcast of a university debate in which Muggeridge was a guest speaker was cancelled.¹¹ BBC policy throughout this episode was steered from the top. Jacob deplored the Altrincham and Muggeridge criticisms and was determined that, whatever the press and ITV might do, they should not be given publicity by the BBC. Peacock wrote to Muggeridge: 'I was somewhat disconcerted to find out that although Carleton Greene [Director of Administration], Leonard [Miall] et al would very much like to see you back in BBC

programmes, Sir Ian Jacob is clinging tightly to the reins until the end of the year.’¹²

Competition from within: television versus radio

One of the myths of broadcasting history, still being perpetuated 50 years later, was that 2 June 1953 was ‘the day that changed TV’.¹³ The size of the Coronation audience, which peaked at more than 20 million people, was by far the biggest for television so far and nearly double that for radio. But in 1953 there were fewer than 2.2 million television sets in use. It is estimated that 7.8 million people viewed in their own homes, another 10.4 million watched in homes of friends and 1.5 million in theatres, cinemas, church halls, hospitals and factories.¹⁴

The Coronation may have stimulated the demand for television sets, though not until 1958 did combined television and licences exceed those for radio, 8 million against 6.6 million.¹⁵ Radio, far from being eclipsed, continued to draw large audiences. In June 1956 some 12 million people listened to a boxing commentary, nearly three times as many as were watching the television play at the same time.¹⁶ By the end of the 1950s television had become the dominant medium in the evening but during the day, when screens were blank, radio was still very popular. *Two-Way Family Favourites* attracted around 12 million listeners at Sunday lunchtime throughout 1959, sometimes more than twice the peak television audience that evening.¹⁷ *Radio Times* continued to put radio billings ahead of television’s until 1957 and not until 1958-59 did the BBC spend more on television than radio.¹⁸

Far from ousting radio in 1953, television had to fight its corner against strong opposition within the BBC. Television’s ‘battle’ with Broadcasting House, the home of radio and the centre of BBC power, was unequal: ‘Sound was the father figure, established and responsible, television the spendthrift and tiresome adolescent’.¹⁹ The appointment of George Barnes, and Gerald Beadle as Barnes’s successor, reinforced the perception that the BBC wanted to put television in safe hands rather than dynamic ones. Barnes ‘made no secret of the fact that he regarded his work in television only as an interlude’²⁰. Beadle’s only experience of television had been during four years in the West Region and he admitted that to be given the top job was ‘quite unexpected’.²¹

When Sir Arthur fforde became Chairman of the Governors in 1957 he did not own a television set.

Moreover, radio values dominated television in significant areas and held back its development. There was a strong impetus in the BBC to 'ensure that the standards which had been built up with so much devotion in sound broadcasting would not be jeopardised by the brash young television service'.²² The notorious example was news. From 1948 to 1958 the Editor, News was Tahu Hole. All his broadcasting experience was in radio and he was determined to perpetuate radio's news standards. News was a series of factual statements delivered without comment or explanation by an announcer in an upper-class accent. The news gained a reputation for being accurate, impartial and trustworthy, though critics such as Fairlie argued that by divorcing a happening from its origins and circumstances, the BBC's bulletins were 'as guilty of gross distortion as any politically biased newspaper'. BBC news, Fairlie claimed, did not attempt to discover the truth; it merely recorded public events without investigating what lay behind them. In doing so it upheld authority.²³

When television arrived it had no news bulletins and Hole was determined to keep it that way. He was convinced that if the newsreader could be seen, a mere facial expression could destroy the impartiality on which the BBC's news reputation was based. He was also afraid that the integrity of the news would be damaged by the cult of personality. Not until July 1954, with ITV looming, did BBC television have its own news bulletins and even then the announcers were not seen. They supplied a voice-over to news film or, if none was available, to a caption. Not until a fortnight before ITV started were the newsreaders seen but they were still not named.

Another area where radio values were imposed on television was variety. Comedians used to the freedom of the variety theatre were seen as a potential threat to the good taste which the BBC was anxious to foster. Cecil McGivern, the Director of Television Programmes, declared that 'smut or risqué stuff is much worse in television than in any other entertainment medium ... gestures, facial expressions etc give an extra weight and even seemingly harmless stuff can be quite embarrassing on one's home screen'.²⁴ The phrase 'one's home screen' suggests that the BBC was still in the Reithian mode of trying to impose middle-class values on its audience.

Radio's guidelines had been set down in a 'private and confidential' pamphlet, *BBC Variety Programmes Policy Guide for Writers and Producers*.²⁵ Known as the 'Green Book' it was produced in 1948 by Michael Standing, head of radio entertainment. There was an 'absolute ban' on jokes about lavatories, effeminacy in men and immorality of any kind; and on suggestive references to honeymoon couples, chambermaids, fig leaves, prostitution and ladies' underwear. 'Extreme care' was to be taken in jokes about marital infidelity. Also banned were jokes about religions or religious denominations and expletives such as 'God', 'good God', 'my God', 'blast', 'hell', 'damn', 'bloody' and 'gorblimey'. During the 1950s the guide was adopted by television. Noting that 'ITA programmes are (perhaps deliberately) departing from the standards of taste set by the BBC', Waldman, the Head of Light Entertainment, felt it necessary to remind producers in his department of the Green Book and some of its key phrases.²⁶ The Green Book can also be seen as the BBC trying to impose conservative middle-class attitudes, such as reticence about sex, intolerance of sexual deviance (homosexuality and prostitution), the sanctity of religious (particularly Christian) belief and seemly language.

In programme presentation, too, television adopted the conventions of radio. From the early years, radio announcers on duty in the evening were required to wear dinner jackets.²⁷ Television adopted a similar policy. Continuity announcers appeared on screen to introduce programmes. The men wore a dinner jacket and black tie, the women an evening gown. The regular women announcers, Sylvia Peters and Mary Malcolm, had distinctly upper middle-class accents, while Malcolm's aristocratic connections (she was a granddaughter of Lillie Langtry, mistress of Edward VII, and the wife of a wealthy Scottish baronet) were well publicised in the press. David Attenborough, who joined the BBC as a trainee in 1952, likened them to hostesses at a dinner party.²⁸ Here was an example of Marwick's 'strict formalism in language, etiquette and dress code'. Television was using a tone and mode of address which perpetuated a rigid class system.

Competition from without: BBC versus ITV

In the summer of 1953, with the government committed to introducing a second

television channel, the BBC Board of Management met at Clymping in Sussex. Its deliberations were summarised by Jacob.²⁹ He acknowledged the dangers 'if the audience for BBC television is drawn away by competitors who offer little but popular fare. Our aims cannot be fulfilled unless we retain the attention of the mass audience as well as of the important minorities. The justification for the existence of the corporation, supported by a universal licence, largely disappears if the mass audience is lost'. The BBC's position up to the introduction of ITV in September 1955 remained that of the Clymping conference. While there was a place for intelligent minority programmes, they must not replace popular shows during the evening peak. Even in popular programmes, the highest standards must be maintained. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the BBC Chairman, said the corporation must stick to its principles: 'I would always resist competing in vulgarity or degeneration of programmes.'³⁰

BBC policy was made public in the *Radio Times* of 16 September 1955, covering the week in which ITV went on the air. At the front of the magazine was a full-page article by Barnes, under the heading 'BBC Television: a National Service'.³¹ He argued that the BBC offered a television system 'which because of its range and national character is unique'. This contrasted with the limited reach of the new channel: 'The starting up of an alternative service for a few hundred people in London does not affect either the duty or the practice of the service which supplies those who are out of range of competitive television and, indeed, those who do not want it'. The article attempted to assert BBC experience, tradition, prestige and breadth of coverage. It did not suggest that the BBC would change its traditional policies in response to competition.

The first issue of *TV Times*, dated 20 September 1955, also carried an editorial, though in more crisper language.³² It said: 'So far television in this country has been a monopoly restricted by ... a lofty attitude towards the wishes of viewers by those in control ... Viewers will no longer have to accept what has been deemed best for them. They will be able to pick and choose ...' The article underlined a fundamental difference between BBC and ITV. One was run by Oxbridge-educated public servants and the other by self-made leaders of the entertainment industry, such as Val Parnell, Prince Littler, Lew Grade and Sidney Bernstein. This soon became evident in ITV's

programmes, such as *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, the game show, *Take Your Pick*, which had originated, significantly, in the BBC's sound competitor, Radio Luxembourg, and *Double Your Money* in which contestants could win up to £1,000 by answering general knowledge questions. The brashness in presentation and content was in stark contrast to BBC shows, where middle-class good taste stifled exuberance. ITV also scored through regular scheduling, another area where the BBC lagged.

To critics from the educated middle class, such as Peter Black, the success of ITV bore out their fear that a channel geared to the profit motive was bound to play down to the lowest common denominator.³³ A less condescending view is that the success of ITV, which by 1957 had 72% of the audience in homes where viewers had the choice,³⁴ was due to a revolt against the BBC's middle-class stuffiness. Audience research confirms that not only was the television audience predominantly working class but that it was working-class viewers who mainly watched ITV. At the beginning of 1960 the C2 and DE social categories, which very broadly made up the working class, accounted for 68% of the population but for between 80 and 85% of the television audience.³⁵ Moreover it was in the DE class that ITV's share of the audience was greatest.³⁶

Independent research carried out for the ITV company, Associated-Rediffusion, revealed very different perceptions of the two channels. The BBC was seen as stuffy, old fashioned and generally authoritarian, whereas ITV was thought of as modern, young, gay, tolerant and understanding. The BBC was associated with the 'ruling' classes and ITV with 'the people'.³⁷ There was some appreciation of this within the BBC itself. In November 1957, a group of producers in the Talks Department, including Huw Wheldon, Peacock and Donald Baverstock, met Beadle to voice their concerns about the BBC's projection of itself. They argued that the presentation of programmes was 'middle-class in the worst sense of the word'. Programmes themselves were often 'tablets of information handed down from Mount Sinai'. News programmes in particular were permeated with 'a tone of superiority'. Public relations were poor. ITV was projected as being 'hard, adventurous and positive', the BBC as 'defensive, conservative, crestfallen'. It needed to base programmes on a respect for the public, with experience shared with the audience not handed down to it.³⁸

On his retirement from the BBC at the end of 1959, Jacob reflected on the

corporation's response to commercial television. He argued that even though the BBC commanded only 35 to 40% of the audience who had a choice of programme, this was sufficient to satisfy the claims of a national broadcaster: 'We would be in grave danger ... if we had secured a 50:50 *average* because in doing so we would have made our output indistinguishable from that of the ITV.' He suggested that 40% of the public normally stayed with ITV programmes and 25% with the BBC. The rest switched from one to the other. But the significance of the 25% far outweighed that of the 40% because 'the greater part of the educated, thinking and articulate public is numbered in the former'.³⁹ Jacob's 1953 warning about the dangers of losing the mass audience seems to have been forgotten. He was not only conceding the intellectual elitism of the BBC but claiming it as a virtue.

***Tonight* and the limits of change**

More than any other programme *Tonight* has been seen as signalling the desire and ability within the BBC to challenge the tradition of telling viewers what it thought was good for them and trying to meet the audience at least partly on its own terms.

Moreover, it was, though not straightforwardly, a response to competition from ITV, and successful both in critical terms and in commanding a large audience. It first went on the air on 18 February 1957 and was transmitted five days a week from Monday to Friday. Only a couple of months before it had been envisaged as something far less ambitious, a half-hour programme going out once a week.⁴⁰ What changed this was the decision of the government, which then controlled broadcasting hours, to end the 'toddlers' truce', the hour between 6 and 7pm when screens were blank to allow small children to be put to bed and others to get on with their homework.

ITV had been campaigning for the extra hour in order to increase its advertising revenue. But for the BBC to fill the gap would mean more expense with no extra income to meet it. Besides, there were those in the BBC who supported the idea of children having a television-free zone in the early evening. There were also practical objections. All available studio space was taken and there was no facility for mounting a five-day a week programme. The government announcement forced the BBC to put its reservations aside, while the hiring of a studio from the Marconi company in

Kensington overcame the logistic problem. This turned out to be an advantage, allowing the new programme to develop without interference from the centre of television production at Lime Grove.

Although *Tonight* had only six weeks to get itself ready, there had been a previous programme with some of the same elements and personnel. *Highlight* was launched in 1955 to fill a ten-minute gap between the end of *Newsreel* at 7.20 pm and the rest of the evening programmes. It consisted of three short interviews, with a 'hard' news one at the start, a human interest story in the middle and a lighter one to finish. The programme can claim to have pioneered a more robust style of interviewing than was usual in the BBC at the time and this became one of the key elements of *Tonight*. The other legacy to *Tonight* was people. The producer in charge was Donald Baverstock, assisted from November 1955 by Alasdair Milne, then a 25-year-old BBC trainee, and the regular interviewers included Geoffrey Johnson Smith and Cliff Michelmore. Moving from ten minutes a night to 40 (and sometimes 45) required more than interviews and *Tonight* was to present a mixture of items, in which studio interviews would be interspersed with news headlines, film reports, a topical calypso and entertainment spots.

Goldie was instructed by Miall, 'to make the supervision of the successful launching of this enterprise a first call on her time'.⁴¹ Baverstock would be producer in general charge, with Milne directing alternately and helping to choose studio guests. The production team also included Antony Jay, who was responsible with Tony Essex for film content, and Gordon Watkins, whose responsibility was advance planning. In June 1957 Ned Sherrin joined the production team from Light Entertainment. The presenter was Michelmore and studio interviews would be conducted by Johnson Smith and Derek Hart. Apart from Michelmore, the regular team was from the same public school and Oxbridge background which, it has been argued, maintained traditional values in other parts of the BBC. Nor were they necessarily from the political left. Johnson Smith went on to become a Conservative MP and Jay to write speeches for the Conservative Party, while Sherrin was a lifelong Conservative voter. Goldie, too, was a Conservative Party supporter.

Where the *Tonight* team differed from the BBC hierarchy was in age and outlook. Baverstock was 33 when the programme started and Milne, Jay and Essex

only 27. Television was relatively new and, while older hands at the BBC regarded it as an awkward child, Baverstock, Milne and their colleagues were excited by the medium and determined to expand its potential. They had enthusiasm and energy mixed, particularly in Sherrin's case, with irreverence. Baverstock, more than anyone, shaped *Tonight's* policy and tone. His social origins were lower middle-class (he was the son of a Welsh shopkeeper) and while he got to Oxford on academic merit he did not feel comfortable among the Old Etonians at Christ Church and retreated into reading.⁴² Before taking on *Tonight* he had been eight years in the BBC and was steeped in its ethos. At the same time he found much of the BBC attitude complacent and its output dull, especially after a trip to the United States in 1956 where he was impressed by the vigour of current affairs programmes such as Ed Murrow's *See It Now*. He buzzed with ideas, many of them impractical, and had an unshaken belief that *Tonight* should address its audience as equals. His chosen agent for this was Micheltmore.

In educational background, Micheltmore, who had left school at 17 to go into the RAF, was an exception, but an important one. He, more than anyone, was the public face of *Tonight*, described as an 'an avuncular pink-faced middlebrow with a middle-class accent'.⁴³ Micheltmore admitted that he sometimes felt uncomfortable among the 'fierce intellectualism' of Baverstock, Milne and Jay⁴⁴ but he was central to, and a strong supporter of, the programme's aim of being on the viewer's side. Viewers in turn had warm praise for his 'relaxed and easy style which they found pleasing and comfortable to watch'.⁴⁵

Not only was *Tonight* on the viewer's side but it gave the general public a voice. This was helped by the development of lighter and more portable film cameras which gave reporters the flexibility to travel the country in search of stories, offsetting the BBC's traditional South-East bias and bringing ordinary people to the screen for the first time. Carrying on the example set by *Highlight* interviewing was on the side of 'us' against 'them'. *Tonight* was radical, too, in abandoning the pretence of seamless television. Monitors remained in vision and technical breakdowns were not only admitted but conveyed through a telephone in the studio.

With its challenging of conventions *Tonight* can be seen as part of a more general mood of questioning of accepted ideas, which was coming through in the novel and the

theatre and included the first serious criticism of the monarchy. Goldie saw *Tonight* in this wider context: 'By 1957 a number of influences, including that of television itself, had made the viewing millions impatient of paternalism. They were no longer content to be grateful recipients of the opinions of those who were supposed to know better.'

While seeing *Tonight* as a reflection of this mood, 'it was not rebellious, far less revolutionary, but it was sceptical, particularly of theorists and "experts". If *Panorama* with Richard Dimbleby had become the voice of authority, *Tonight* with Cliff Michelmore was rapidly becoming the voice of the people'.⁴⁶ Peter Black's verdict, on the second anniversary, was that '*Tonight*'s greatest achievement has been to shatter into a million pieces the image of the corporation, well-meaning and pious, that other programmes, sometimes without knowing it, have built up'.⁴⁷ But there were limits beyond which *Tonight* could not go and these can be illustrated by three incidents in the first year.

Baverstock was determined from the start that *Tonight* should have an entertainment element. Among his recruits was the West Indian-born actor and singer, Cy Grant, who became one of the first black artists regularly to appear on British television. For the first programme, and for the next six weeks, he booked Jonathan Miller.⁴⁸ Only 22, Miller was a medical student who had been a star of the Cambridge Footlights, where his gangling style led him to be compared with Danny Kaye. On 18 April 1957 he performed a comic sketch on *Tonight* about the death of Lord Nelson. It began with a joke about Nelson, having lost an arm and a leg, being 'only half the man he was', with Miller giving a physical demonstration. This was followed by speculation about whether Nelson's last words to Captain Hardy were 'kismet' (destiny) or 'kiss me', with Hardy, to Nelson's consternation, acting vigorously upon the latter. Miller had already performed the sketch in a Footlights revue in the West End and would do it again in the American version of *Beyond the Fringe*.⁴⁹

But what was deemed suitable for the stage was apparently unacceptable for television. Christopher Soames, a Conservative MP, wrote to Jacob complaining that the item was 'contemptible and detestable'. More significant, for the light it throws on internal BBC thinking, was the reaction of Goldie. Given direct responsibility for *Tonight*, she had been sympathetic to the programme from the start, found the studio

space to enable it to go ahead and shielded the volatile and sometimes wayward Baverstock against criticism from above. But not this time. In a furious memorandum to him she called Miller's sketch 'one of the most disastrous pieces of bad taste I have seen on BBC television for a long time'. She listed three specific objections. One, mockery of dying should not be allowed on the programme. Two, to make a mockery of naval death immediately after an item on the *Amethyst* [the British frigate which came under fire on the Yangste], which was probably watched by relatives of men who died in naval action, was quite intolerable. Three, the fact that the item was put out on the eve of Good Friday and immediately preceding *Jesus of Nazareth*, must have given offence to many viewers who were devout Christians. Goldie recalled that after a previous lapse of taste from Miller she had decided that no more sketches should be included on *Tonight* without her having seen them first. In face of Baverstock's protests she had demurred but this was now an instruction [underlined]. Further, she preferred that Miller should make no more contributions to *Tonight* unless she was consulted first. This again was an instruction.⁵⁰

The second incident was an interview by Johnson Smith with Colin Warren, the 25-year-old uncle of Allan Warren, a seven-year-old boy who had been sexually assaulted and murdered. Colin Warren had been interviewed by the police as a suspect. In the interview, he was asked what it felt like to be questioned about a murder. Initially the BBC, through its Chief Publicity Officer, defended the interview. *Tonight* was a topical programme and Colin Warren was entirely topical, though it was probably the first time that someone questioned in a murder case had been interviewed on BBC television. The matter had been referred to the Director-General, but he was on leave, and his deputy had said it could be left to the public relations department.⁵¹

Almost immediately the BBC did an about-face. A statement inserted into radio and television news bulletins said the interview should not have been broadcast and added that producers were supposed to refer decisions on matters of policy and taste to a more senior official. The failure to do so was a serious error of judgment. Baverstock's reaction to this veiled public criticism was hardly an apology: 'If the BBC says this was wrong it obviously was'.⁵² Beadle later explained that the interview 'ran counter to one of the basic principles of BBC broadcasting, that current crime should

not be exploited for the purpose of entertainment'.⁵³ The BBC's condemnation was supported by liberal newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Observer*, but as in the Miller sketch the episode shows Baverstock trying to push out the boundaries of acceptability and being rebuffed.

The third incident raised issues less of taste than balance. In October 1957 a columnist in the *Nuneaton Evening Tribune* complained that the town was being neglected by television. Tipped off about this, *Tonight* decided to send Slim Hewitt to Nuneaton to do a film report. Hewitt, the son of a London butcher, was the only regular member of the *Tonight* team from a working-class background. One of several recruits from the news magazine, *Picture Post*, where he had been a still photographer, he started on *Tonight* as a cameraman but Baverstock saw his potential as a reporter and he combined both roles. A lugubrious, melancholy figure who wore a shabby raincoat and smoked a small cigar, Hewitt became known for offbeat stories.⁵⁴ Although he downplayed his cockney accent, and got his better educated colleagues to help him with scripts, he had a distinctive style based on the common touch and audience research showed he was popular with viewers.

His Nuneaton film, transmitted on 14 October 1957, has not survived but according to a press report 'the camera gave unflattering views of the backs of houses, chimney stacks and the empty railway station'. His commentary called Nuneaton 'the place everyone passes by' and referred to the 'lovely outlook - chimney stacks and three slag heaps'. He also called George Eliot, the novelist who was born in the town, 'a bloke'.⁵⁵ Nuneaton's dignitaries were outraged. The Vicar called the film a caricature and the Baptist Minister 'the most dreadful travesty I have ever seen', while the Town Clerk said it was unbalanced and depicted the town's worst features.⁵⁶ But some of the ordinary townspeople disagreed, suggesting that the item had hit its target. 'Thanks to Slim Hewitt for his splendid mickey-taking programme' ran one letter to the local paper, while another called the film 'brilliant'.⁵⁷

Instead of standing by the film *Tonight* sent Johnson Smith to Nuneaton the next day to do a follow-up in which the critics were given the chance to reply. This was shown on 17 October. On the same day Jacob was questioned about the episode by an audience in London and seemed unapologetic. 'Everyone likes to be reflected in the

very best light but sometimes they do not merit this'.⁵⁸ But after Nuneaton Borough Council, at a special meeting, called on the BBC to apologise, Jacob retreated. In a letter to the council he said he was 'very sorry that you feel the two items did not, on balance, give a fair picture of Nuneaton. It is certainly not our intention to leave you dissatisfied'. Not only would they send a film unit at an early date to take more camera shots, but the Mayor might indicate what these might be.⁵⁹ *Tonight* may have broken the mould in several ways but as with the Miller sketch and the Warren interview, it was only allowed to go so far.

Conclusion

At the end of the 1950s the BBC was still dominated by the values of a governing elite drawn from a narrow social and educational background. Deference to authority, whether it was the monarchy or the political system, was allied to a determination to impose conservative middle-class attitudes on a predominantly working-class audience which had led to the haemorrhaging of that audience to ITV. The debate about the dangers of losing the mass audience was resolved in favour of maintaining traditional standards, which meant no concessions to the perceived vulgarity of the rival channel.

At the same time young creative people, led by Baverstock, Milne and Peacock, saw the BBC as stuffy and arrogant and were trying to promote change. *Tonight* was the strongest expression of this, though it was still forced to operate within traditional constraints of taste and balance. The BBC which Hugh Greene took over had not only failed to cope with the populism of ITV but had been slower than other forms, notably the novel, the theatre or the cinema, to engage with a more questioning mood in society.

Notes

(BBC WAC refers to the BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham)

1. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States c 1958-c 1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p 3.
2. Henry Fairlie, 'The BBC', in Hugh Thomas, ed, *The Establishment* (London: Ace Books, 1962; orig 1959), p 176.

3. Stuart Hood, *On Television* (2nd ed, London: Pluto Press, 1983), p 41.
4. Asa Briggs, *Governing the BBC* (London: BBC, 1979), p 266.
5. Robert Rowland, 'Panorama in the Sixties', in Anthony Aldgate, James Chapman and Arthur Marwick, eds, *Windows on the Sixties: Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp 157-58.
6. David Nathan, *The Laughtermakers: A Quest for Comedy* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), p 131.
7. Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics, 1936-1976* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), p 70.
8. Ibid, pp 74-78.
9. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1957.
10. *The Times*, 16 October 1957.
11. *News Chronicle*, 18 December 1957.
12. BBC WAC: Malcolm Muggeridge Talks File 1a.
13. *Radio Times*, 31 May 2003, p 32.
14. BBC WAC R9/35/1: Audience Research: Listening and Viewing Barometer, 29 June 1952-30 June 1953; *The Times*, 3 June 1953.
15. Asa Briggs, *Governing the BBC* (London: BBC, 1979), p 277.
16. BBC WAC R9/35/5: Audience Research: Listening and Viewing Barometer, 1 January-31 December 1956.
17. BBC WAC R9/35/8: Audience Research: Listening and Viewing Barometer, 1 January-31 December 1959.
18. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, vol V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp 1005-1007.
19. Goldie, op cit, p 50.
20. *The Times*, 23 September 1960.
21. Gerald Beadle, *Television: A Critical Review* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), pp 32-33.
22. Goldie, op cit, p 46.
23. Fairlie, op cit, pp 185-186.
24. BBC WAC T16/157: internal memo from McGivern, June 23 1947.
25. BBC WAC R24/259.

26. BBC WAC T16/162/2: Waldman to all Light Entertainment Producers, 9 April 1956.
27. Leonard Miall, *Inside the BBC* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994) pp 14-15.
28. David Attenborough, *Life on Air* (London: BBC Books, 2002), p 19.
29. BBC WAC R1/89/4: 'The Corporation's Attitude to Competition', 8 August 1953.
30. David Dilks, ed, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971), p 793.
31. *Radio Times*, 16 September 1955, p 3.
32. *TV Times*, 20 September 1955, p 3.
33. *Daily Mail*, 27 September 1955.
34. Quoted in Briggs (1995), op cit, p 20.
35. Granada Viewership Survey, January-March 1960 (London: Granada TV Network, 1960).
36. Robert Silvey, 'The Measurement of Audiences', BBC Lunch-time Lectures fourth Series - 4, 12 January 1966 (London: BBC, 1966), p 11.
37. Leonard Smith, *Half Decade: An Inside Story* (London: Associated-Rediffusion, 1961) p 16.
38. BBC WAC T16/204/1: Huw Wheldon to Goldie, 27 November 1957.
39. BBC WAC T16/214/6: 'The BBC: Past and Present. Memorandum by the Director-General', 30 December 1959.
40. BBC WAC T32/1853/1: Baverstock to Goldie, 4 December 1956.
41. Ibid: Miall to McGivern, 7 January 1957.
42. Alasdair Milne, *DG: The Memoirs of a British Broadcaster* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), p 18.
43. Quoted in Gordon Watkins, ed, *Tonight: BFI Television Dossier 15* (London: British Film Institute, 1982), p 29.
44. Ibid, p 30.
45. BBC WAC VR/57/190: Audience Research Department memo on *Tonight*, week of 5 April 1957.
47. *Daily Mail*, 19 February 1959.

48. BBC WAC T32/1856/1: Baverstock to Tom Sloan, Assistant Head of Light Entertainment, 25 January 1957.
49. The text is in Alan Bennett, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore, *The Complete Beyond the Fringe* (London: Methuen, 1987), p 135.
50. BBC WAC T32/1669/1: Goldie to Baverstock, 23 April 1957.
51. *Daily Telegraph*, 16 August 1957.
52. *Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1957.
53. BBC WAC T16/162/2: Beadle to a meeting of Controllers, 20 August 1957.
54. Interview with Hewitt, *South Wales Evening Post*, 10 December 1957.
55. *Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 1957.
56. *Birmingham Mail*, 15 October 1957.
57. *Nuneaton Evening Tribune*, 15 October 1957.
58. *Birmingham Post*, 18 October 1957.
59. *The Times*, 31 October 1957.

II. GREENE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

1. THE GREENE FACTOR AND THE PROCESSES OF CHANGE

Hugh Carleton Greene¹ was the BBC's Director-General for the whole of the 1960s bar the final nine months and is associated more than any other individual with great changes in the BBC during a period that also saw a cultural revolution. The first chapter attempted to set out the main characteristics of the BBC, in terms of continuity and change, which Greene inherited. This section assesses what Greene, in background, character and broadcasting experience, brought to the job of Director-General and to raise some of the issues, to be dealt with in greater detail later, about how, and to what extent, he promoted and managed change.

It has been argued that those running the BBC tended to come from a restricted social and educational background and that this shaped their attitudes and beliefs. Ostensibly Greene fits the pattern. His social origins were at the upper end of the middle classes.² His great-grandfather, Benjamin Greene, established the brewery in Suffolk which became Greene King and bought extensive sugar plantations in the West Indies. Two of his sons were sent out to manage the Caribbean estates. One was Greene's grandfather. Another son was a director of the Bank of England, another became an MP. But if respectability was one family trait, there were also strains of nonconformity and eccentricity. Hugh once observed: 'We Greenes are all a little bonkers.'³

Greene's father intended to become a barrister but went into school teaching and rose to be Headmaster of Berkhamsted public school in Hertfordshire. One of six children, Greene was brought up largely by nannies and educated at his father's school, where he found the devotion to patriotism, empire and muscular Christianity oppressive. He went on to Oxford but, like his brother Graham, the novelist, did not follow the path which this conventional background had mapped out. Richard Hoggart compared Greene to Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books, who was also 'inspired by a rebellious resistance to restrictive aspects of the society into whose more comfortable reaches he had been born'.⁴ Instead of pursuing one of the more

respectable middle-class professions, such as the civil service which his father favoured, Greene became a journalist.

Although he later claimed that this had been a deliberate choice, he stumbled into it after making abortive approaches to publishing and the film industry. Moreover, he took the unusual route of becoming a foreign correspondent without previous journalistic experience. Before going up to Oxford he had spent time in Germany learning the language and it was in Germany where he spent most of his newspaper career. He was a stringer in Munich for the *New Statesman* and *Daily Herald* before joining the *Daily Telegraph* office in Berlin. The brutality and intolerance of the Nazi dictatorship appalled him, and coloured his later attitude to broadcasting. He took easily to journalism, showing resourcefulness and ability to cultivate contacts. By 1938, still only 27, he was appointed the *Telegraph's* chief correspondent in Berlin. Expelled from Germany in May 1939, he moved to Warsaw and was in the Polish capital when the Second World War started.

In 1940 Greene became head of the BBC German Service, essentially a propaganda role in which he was responsible for sending news in German to Germany about the progress of the war. A fluent German speaker, he also took part in discussion programmes. It was his first experience both of broadcasting and of management and his delight in challenging authority began to surface. He ignored the daily directives of a superior for whom he felt contempt and relished telling how he resisted a Foreign Office request to kill a news item about a pledge on the future of Austria, given by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, in an incautious impromptu speech after an ample lunch.⁵ Nor was Greene a typical BBC mandarin. Robert Dougall, who worked under him at this time, remembered Greene as 'no mean drinker with a special liking for beer', with his 'suits rumpled in what seemed like an almost cultivated untidiness'. He was 'nearly always grinning hugely' and had 'an air of impish mischief about him'.⁶ A minor, if telling, piece of eccentricity is that Greene, a keen cricketer, kept wicket, not the obvious position for a man who was 6ft 7in tall and wore thick spectacles.⁷

Despite his contempt for some of those running the BBC Greene developed an unshakeable belief in the virtues of public service broadcasting as exemplified by the corporation. In 1946 he was seconded to the British Control Commission in Germany

to rebuild German broadcasting. His model was the BBC, a system independent of government or politicians, financed by a licence fee and with a chief executive responsible to a board of governors who had shed any political allegiances. After a year organising propaganda against the Communist insurgency in Malaya, Greene was put in charge of BBC services to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. He eventually moved from the External Services into the mainstream of the BBC, serving as Director of Administration and, in a post created specially for him, Director of News and Current Affairs. He was the first Director-General to have been a professional broadcaster and to have had direct experience of programme making.

Although he had been groomed for the job by his predecessor, Sir Ian Jacob, Greene thought Jacob too cautious: 'Jacob feels that he unlocked the doors ... but I would say that he did not always open them very wide.' He fundamentally disagreed with Jacob's action over Malcolm Muggeridge's criticisms of the monarchy (see Chapter I): 'I do not believe it was right to stop *Panorama* handling a matter of public interest or right to keep Muggeridge off the air.'⁸ Jacob, for his part, accused Greene of departing from one of the 'governing thoughts' behind the BBC, that you did not offend against good taste. For Jacob the function of the governors and the Director-General was to keep a steady course without departing from reasonable standards and he thought the BBC should reflect the best in society and not the worst.⁹

Greene's very different outlook on broadcasting was shaped by his character and professional experience. First, the suppression of a free press by the Nazis and the jamming of radio broadcasts by the Soviet Union underlined for him the necessity of free expression. At the same time he became convinced that air time should not be given to political extremists. Before becoming Director-General he declared that a broadcasting system should not be neutral in clear issues of right and wrong. 'I should not for a moment admit that a man who wanted to speak in favour of racial intolerance had the same rights as a man who wanted to condemn it.'¹⁰

Secondly, he regarded himself first and always as a journalist. As Head of News and Current Affairs from 1958 to 1960 he moved the BBC away from the rigid news agenda of his predecessor, Tahu Hole (see Chapter I) and encouraged a more lively coverage of current affairs. Grace Wyndham Goldie recalled: 'There was a different

atmosphere created by Hugh Greene because he was a journalist. He opened up the rather parochial attitudes that were then prevalent.’¹¹ He regarded broadcasting as a part of journalism in that ‘everything that is broadcast must have a relevance to its time’ (he made an exception for music, admitting that he was ‘pretty well tone deaf’).¹²

Thirdly, by the time he became Director-General he was very much a BBC man, critical of what he saw as hidebound practices but convinced of its public service principles. Fourthly, there was the impulse, identified by Hoggart, to rebel against his background. Hoggart noted that ‘he hated the habits and especially the old-boy mutual protectiveness practised by the great establishments of state and church’. But nothing about Greene is straightforward. Hoggart also pointed out that he was part of at least one establishment, going to Ascot in the regulation formal dress.¹³ Fifthly, he was an agnostic, both in the religious sense and more widely. He wrote his own epitaph: ‘Because I believe in nothing, I am not willing to disbelieve in anything.’¹⁴ Finally, he brought to the job a sense of mischief and a relish for battle, with a determination to see off those for whom he had no time, such as ITV and Mary Whitehouse.

A fundamental question is how far Greene set out with intentions fully-formed and how far he responded to events. Greene’s version, at least in retrospect, is that he became Director-General determined to change things: ‘What was in the forefront of my mind at the time was that the BBC seemed to have lost touch with a changing society in the early and mid-1950s and that its programmes had got rather stuffy, particularly the news and current affairs.’¹⁵ Again: ‘I wanted to open the windows and dissipate the ivory tower stuffiness which still clung to some parts of the BBC. I wanted to encourage enterprise and the taking of risks. I wanted to make the BBC a place where talent of all sorts, however unconventional, was recognised and nurtured.’¹⁶

But while Greene was a skilful propagandist, not least for himself, others have a different interpretation. Alasdair Milne, a rising young BBC executive in the 1960s, called Greene a pragmatist and added: ‘I got the impression working under him that he was living from day to day and didn’t know what he was letting loose.’ Hoggart, who got to know Greene while a member of the Pilkington Committee, agreed. ‘He didn’t know what he was doing, to be brutal. He didn’t think deeply. He was the right man for

the right moment ... he didn't really know what sort of revolution he'd caused.'¹⁷

Another question is how much Greene promoted change and to what extent the impetus came from lower down. A Director-General does not usually initiate programmes. Greene was unusual in getting two of his own projects on the air. One was *Perry Mason*, an American import the BBC (and ITV) had previously turned down. The other was *Songs of Praise*, a Sunday evening programme of hymns.¹⁸ Neither fits the picture of Greene as an innovator, still less an iconoclast. *Perry Mason* was a formulaic courtroom drama while *Songs of Praise* upheld the Christian values which Greene's critics, notably Whitehouse, accused him of destroying. Ironically, when Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association decided to make an annual award to a programme 'of high quality' *Songs of Praise* was one of the recipients.¹⁹

In spite of *Perry Mason* and *Songs of Praise*, Greene acknowledged that 'most of the best ideas must come from below, not from above'.²⁰ Much of the innovative television in the BBC during the 1960s developed as a result of a push from below, whether from Ned Sherrin in satire, Peter Watkins in documentary and writers, directors and producers, from Dennis Potter to Ken Loach and Tony Garnett. But they were working in a climate receptive to new ideas for which Greene was to a large degree responsible. According to Goldie, while Greene was not himself a creator, he understood how the creative process worked and how it had to be fostered.²¹

Projects which started from below had to be negotiated. Often, in the 1960s, they raised problems of sex, language and violence, or, more generally, taste and balance. Unlike the cinema, which had the British Board of Film Censors, or the theatre, with the Lord Chamberlain, the BBC was subject to no outside regulation. Censorship was internal, largely a matter of judgment and started with producers. Robert Rowland, who worked on *Panorama* during the 1960s, described the process as 'an understanding of devolved responsibility and authority within a system of "upward reference"'. This was rarely defined but 'all producers were expected to have an instinct for knowing when they needed advice, or when those senior to them needed to know that a course of action would be initiated which might need approval'.²² Rowland was referring to current affairs but the same principles applied elsewhere. In exceptional cases, where

the process failed to operate at programme level, the matter would go higher and might reach the Director-General and the governors, as happened over *That Was the Week That Was* and *The War Game*.

Greene represented himself as a champion of innovation and experiment, and critics blamed him for what they saw as the excesses of the BBC during his time. To Whitehouse can be added Robin Day, for whom *That Was the Week That Was* and its satirical successors represented a flagrant breach of the BBC's standards of balance and decency.²³ On the other hand Greene was more cautious than his subsequent reputation suggests. He was concerned about violence on television, particularly from imported American crime series and westerns. Having originally encouraged *TW3*, he took it off the air. He cancelled a *Panorama* report from the Smethwick during the 1964 election campaign because he regarded it as racially sensitive.²⁴ He decided that *The War Game* should not be shown on television.

The Director-General, as chief executive, is responsible to the Board of Governors. They appoint him, they monitor his performance and they can remove him. It was argued in Chapter I that because of their age and background, governors were unrepresentative of the viewing and listening population and tended towards a conservative outlook. In Jacob's time there was little friction, partly because Jacob eschewed confrontation. Greene largely inherited Jacob's governors, including the Chairman, Sir Arthur fforde. Greene insisted that a good relationship between the Director-General and the Chairman was essential to the smooth running of the BBC and he claimed to have had one with both fforde and his successor, Lord Normanbrook.

Greene believed in delegating authority and relying on the judgment of his executives and producers. As someone who set out to change the BBC, he might have brought in new blood rather than rely on the people who had been associated with the 'stuffy' BBC of the 1950s. In the event, almost all the top positions in BBC management during his Director-Generalship were filled from within. When the head of the television service, Gerald Beadle, retired, his successor was his deputy, Kenneth Adam. When Adam retired in 1968, he was succeeded by Huw Wheldon, who had joined the BBC in 1952. There was similar continuity in the production departments, with Grace Wyndham Goldie taking over Talks and Current Affairs from Leonard

Miall, and Tom Sloan replacing his boss, Eric Maschwitz, as Head of Light Entertainment. The only major figure Greene brought in from outside was Sydney Newman to run the Drama Department.

It was also notable that the younger and more dynamic executives and programme makers, who might have been expected to flourish under a radical Director-General, left the BBC during Greene's time. There were specific reasons for the departure of Donald Baverstock, Alasdair Milne, and Michael Peacock, three of the brightest young talents to emerge in the 1950s, but their replacement by more emollient figures such as Wheldon and David Attenborough may suggest that there were limits to Greene's and the BBC's commitment to change.

Greene's time as Director-General had three main phases. In the first, which ran from January 1960 to the middle of 1962, the BBC in general and he personally, were preoccupied with presenting the corporation's case to the Pilkington Committee into the future of broadcasting. As will be argued below, the BBC won its case not by presenting itself as an institution in a process of dynamic change but by relying on traditional arguments for public service broadcasting.

The second phase which ran from the middle of 1962 to the middle of 1967 were the years of greatest innovation and deepest controversy. Early on Greene had appalled radio traditionalists (including his brother, Herbert) by moving the main evening news from its hallowed 9pm slot to 10pm. Television, for a while, was a relatively uncontentious area, though *Z-Cars* (January 1962) and *Steptoe and Son* (June 1962) signalled new directions in drama and comedy. *That Was the Week That Was* (November 1962) represented the most radical departure from previous BBC practice, attracting large and approving audiences but also a backlash. In October 1964 *The Wednesday Play* began, while the end of 1965 saw the debate over *The War Game*. It was during this period, too, that Greene started publicly to proclaim his libertarianism, notably in the Rome speech of February 1965 in which he spoke of the BBC's duty to be ahead of public opinion, instead of waiting upon it, of promoting an atmosphere of healthy scepticism and of encouraging creative people to take risks.²⁵

It was the arrival of Lord Hill as Chairman in 1967 which precipitated Greene's third phase, his least happy and arguably his least effective. The motives behind the appointment and its effect on Greene are analysed in the final chapter.

Notes

1. He was known as Hugh Carleton Greene until his knighthood in January 1964, when he shortened his name to Sir Hugh Greene.
2. Details of Greene's family background and early career are drawn from Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983).
3. Quoted in Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene, vol I, 1904-39* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), p 20.
4. Richard Hoggart, *An Imagined Life: Life and Times, vol III, 1959-91* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), p 51.
5. Greene, in *Battles of Broadcasting*, BBC2, 11 October 1980.
6. Robert Dougall, *In and Out of the Box* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1973), p 237.
7. *Radio Lives: Hugh Greene, A Great DG?* Radio 4, 27 May 1993.
8. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Oral History Transcript, Hugh Greene interviewed by Frank Gillard, 19 March 1977.
9. BBC WAC R143/73/1: Oral History Transcript, Ian Jacob interviewed by Frank Gillard, 6 October 1976.
10. 'Two Threats to Broadcasting: Political and Commercial Control', speech to German businessmen at Bad Schwalbach, 18 April 1959.
11. Goldie, in *Battles of Broadcasting*, op cit.
12. Greene, in *Battles of Broadcasting*, op cit.
13. Hoggart, *An Imagined Life*, op cit, p 35.
14. The words are on his gravestone in Cockfield, the Suffolk village where he lived from the 1960s to his death in 1987.
15. Greene, in *Battles of Broadcasting*, op cit.
16. Greene, *The Third Floor Front; A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969), pp 13-14.
17. Both quotations from *Radio Lives*, op cit.
18. Tracey, op cit, pp 232-33.
19. Mary Whitehouse, *Quite Contrary: An Autobiography* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1993), pp 88-90.

20. Greene, *The Third Floor Front*, op cit, p 14.
21. BBC WAC R143/139/2: BBC Oral History Project, Goldie interviewed by Huw Wheldon, December 1977.
22. Robert Rowland, 'Panorama in the Sixties', in Anthony Aldgate, et al, eds, *Windows on the Sixties: Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p 162.
23. Robin Day, *Grand Inquisitor* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), pp 171-73.
24. Rowland, op cit, pp 171-72.
25. The speech, entitled 'The Conscience of the Programme Director', was reprinted in *The Listener*, 17 June 1965, pp 889-890.

2. A FORCE FOR STABILITY: BBC TELEVISION MANAGEMENT

Introduction

It has been established that the Director-General of the BBC did not normally initiate programmes. Programme ideas usually started in the output departments such as drama, documentary and light entertainment. Between the Director-General and the output departments was a layer of management, which is the subject of this section. By examining the attitudes and actions of the key managers, it will attempt to establish the degree to which they promoted change or, on the contrary, acted as a buffer against changes initiated 'from below'. It will also address the apparent paradox that, under a Director-General prepared to challenge authority and keen to encourage experiment, the more radical figures were marginalised while safer pairs of hands survived.

The structure of television management during the 1960s, and the leading personnel, were as follows. The most senior post, Director of Television, was held by Gerald Beadle (1956-61) and Kenneth Adam (1961-68). Adam was succeeded by Huw Wheldon, who took the title Managing Director, Television (1969-75), to mark the job's enhanced status as it gained an added responsibility for finance. Under the Director of Television were four controllers: for engineering, programme services, administration and programmes. The first three, as the titles imply, provided technical and organisational back-up. The key figure was the Controller of Programmes, effectively deputy to the Director of Television and responsible for the content and balance of programmes and deciding the allocation of resources to them. The job was held by Adam (1957-61), Stuart Hood (1961-64) and Wheldon (1965-68). David Attenborough (1969-72) succeeded Wheldon with the title of Director of Programmes. The Director of Television sat on the six-strong Board of Management, which met weekly under the Director-General. When, towards the end of Greene's time, the Board was enlarged, both Wheldon and Attenborough represented television.

With the arrival of the second channel in 1964 there was a further layer of management, with BBC1 and BBC2 each having an executive at its head, initially called Chief of Programmes and later Controller. The heads of BBC1 were Donald Baverstock (1964-65), Michael Peacock (1965-67) and Paul Fox (1967-73). The heads of BBC2 were Peacock (1963-65), Attenborough (1965-68) and Robin Scott (1969-

74). Leaving aside Beadle, essentially a figure from the 1950s who has been discussed previously, and Scott, who arrived at the end of the 1960s, the remaining names can be put into two groups: those (Adam, Wheldon, Attenborough, Fox) who were with the BBC throughout the decade and represent continuity, and those (Hood, Baverstock, Peacock) who left the corporation during Hugh Greene's Director-Generalship .

Working for continuity: Adam, Wheldon, Attenborough, Fox

Adam's social and educational background was the conventional one for a BBC executive. From a middle-class family, he went from Nottingham High School to Cambridge, where he read history and was President of the Union. He first worked for the BBC as a radio journalist in the 1930s, was head of publicity during and after the Second World War and in 1950 became Controller of the Light Programme. But he had had little experience of television when he was appointed Controller of Programmes in 1957. Moreover, he replaced Cecil McGivern, who was only a year older and widely regarded as one of the most able and creative figures in television. Wheldon called McGivern "much the most impressive single human being that I had anything to do with in the whole of the fifties in the BBC".¹ McGivern had been passed over for the top job when Beadle was appointed and with Adam's arrival was effectively sidelined with the empty title of Deputy Director of Television.

In Wheldon's estimation Adam was 'a much more lightweight man than either Beadle or, especially, Cecil McGivern'.³ Alasdair Milne called Adam 'not the strongest man I have met' and quoted Malcolm Muggeridge, who had known Adam while they were journalists in Manchester in the 1930s, as describing him as 'a man of straw'.⁴ Apart from being a less than forceful personality Adam, according to one source, 'laid no claim to original thinking' and in journalism 'had been a natural reporter, not a leader writer'.⁵ In apparent support of both elements is the striking absence of statements by Adam about his policies or philosophy. Unlike Greene or Wheldon, he kept a low public profile.⁶

While he fully supported Greene's liberal project, he made little original contribution to it and was content to be his master's voice. As the bridge between Greene and the programme departments, Adam dutifully implemented policy from

above, rather than being a creative force in his own right. Wheldon's Oral History interview with Frank Gillard contains the following exchange:

Wheldon [of Adam]: He was extremely loyal to Hugh Greene, indeed almost overloyal in certain ways.

Gillard: He was sycophantic.

Wheldon: I don't know about sycophantic but certainly anything Hugh Greene said went as far as Kenneth was concerned and I never knew him cross Greene in any sort of way.⁷

This is confirmed by Adam's relationship with the most contentious programme of his time as Director of Television, *That Was the Week That Was*. He claimed some credit for the idea, though once *TW3* was on the air he seemed content to follow Greene's lead, passing down the Director-General's comments but adding no thoughts of his own. Adam left the day-to-day running of *TW3* to the production team but on one occasion he looked in on rehearsals and Milne briefed him about what was likely to be (and was) a provocative item, a 'Consumer Guide to Religions'. Milne made it clear that he was not asking Adam for a decision. He (Milne) had decided the piece should be broadcast. According to Milne, Adam 'read it, turned on his heel and walked out without a word'.⁸ Ned Sherrin says that Adam would have preferred to cut the item but 'Milne's stance made that impossible'.⁹ The item was broadcast as planned. Adam was several rungs up the ladder of command from Milne and could have exerted his authority. During its second season *TW3* became so contentious that Greene effectively took over editorial control. Adam's reaction was 'joy that it was no longer his problem'.¹⁰

Adam's reluctance to become embroiled in the rows over *TW3*, or risk upsetting Greene, had a later parallel when he was confronted with Peter Watkins's nuclear war documentary, *The War Game*. As Head of Documentaries Wheldon had recruited Watkins to the BBC, overseen his first major documentary, *Culloden*, and decided, despite misgivings, to support the nuclear film. But he was unhappy about aspects of Watkins's script and because the film required an unusually high budget thought it should be referred upwards to Adam. But Adam did not want to get involved and 'in a rather craven way' (according to Wheldon) passed the script straight to Greene.¹¹

It has been suggested that Adam's effectiveness and authority (like McGivern's before him) were increasingly undermined by drink. After Hood resigned as Controller of Programmes Adam for a while did both jobs. But, according to Wheldon's biographer, Adam 'was past his best, drinking heavily and said to be too far gone to discuss anything after the middle of the day. In the end it was so bad that a senior staff member was deputed to keep an eye on him'.¹² According to Charles Curran, then BBC Secretary, when Lord Normanbrook became Chairman 'he came very quickly to the conclusion that Kenneth Adam had to go. Adam was a busted flush'.¹³

Adam chose as his own epitaph a tribute to him from 'the only governor to acknowledge my departure' [from the BBC]: 'It was your imaginative, liberal approach which fostered creative talent and refused to allow it to be stifled by the Mrs Whitehouses of both sexes'.¹⁴ This is also the verdict of the critic Philip Purser who credits Adam with helping Greene to 'inspire a sunburst of creativity' in BBC Television in the early 1960s and calls him 'a great enabler of good programmes'.¹⁵ *The Times's* obituarist was more measured: 'Those were stormy years for the BBC. It cannot be said that Adam put any distinctive impress on television. He rode the storms, however, and while many deplored BBC Television's new standards he saw these merely as making an equation with changing social habits.'¹⁶

If Adam rarely made public statements about television policy, Wheldon was a tireless propagandist, on the air, in the lecture theatre and in print. His background, and his achievements as editor of *Monitor*, are analysed in Chapter III. In the late 1950s he had found much BBC output patronising and stuffy. In *Monitor* he set out to make programmes accessible to a large audience without compromising their intellectual standards. In some areas he was cautious to a degree. He was worried about deceiving audiences by blurring fact and fiction in documentary, the main cause of his disputes with Ken Russell. On the other hand, while he could be reluctant to embrace new ideas, once persuaded he would back them with the utmost vigour. He may have been a more conservative figure than Adam but he was his own man. There was little rapport with Greene, let alone sycophancy on Wheldon's part. 'I didn't like him much and he didn't like me, not really ... he was more of a news man than I was and I was more a kind of drama, literary man than he was and we weren't friends in any kind of way'.¹⁷

Ironically, just as Wheldon had seen Adam as a lightweight, so Wheldon himself was perceived that way by those who thought that performers did not have the gravitas to be managers. But he had relished command, whether in the Army or on *Monitor*, and when he was offered the job of Controller of Programmes in late 1964 he insisted that he would only take it on his own terms, which included sorting out the management structure immediately under him. The negotiations which eventually sealed Wheldon's promotion appear to have been conducted directly between himself and Greene, with Adam sidelined. According to Wheldon Adam had not known who to appoint and took soundings, 'a rather feeble thing to do'.¹⁸ Wheldon had been brought in to provide stability after a management crisis provoked by the departure of Hood and Greene's reluctance to promote Baverstock (see below). Although eight years older than Baverstock, and 13 years older than Peacock, Wheldon leapfrogged both and soon imposed his authority. The bright young men of the 1950s had yielded to an older and in some ways more traditional figure. By 1968 Wheldon had so put his mark on the television service that he was a candidate to succeed Greene. Instead, he took over from Adam.

Wheldon was a more forceful character than Adam and therefore more liable to find himself at odds with his superiors, whether Greene or the governors, for whom he had little time. Wheldon had not been involved in programmes such as *TW3* and was not by instinct an iconoclast. But now he was in management he had to deal directly with such challenges. *The War Game* was unfinished business from his time as Head of Documentary Programmes. He continued to give the project as much support as he could, calling the first cut of the film 'terrific', while having reservations serious enough to warrant another reference up to Greene.¹⁹ *The War Game* demonstrates Wheldon's ambivalence. He was anxious to give creative talent its head, but was equally determined that programmes should be honest with their audience (which in some respects he felt *The War Game* was not) and not give gratuitous offence.

His biographer calls him 'a benevolent despot who accepted that most people had conservative tastes, and who was not prepared to risk the BBC's reputation with avant-garde experiments'.²⁰ But his attitude towards *The Wednesday Play*, the contemporary drama strand which regularly plunged the BBC into controversy, could show him to be

more enlightened than despotic. In April 1965, soon after Wheldon became Controller of Programmes, he became involved in an internal BBC dispute about *Three Clear Sundays* in which a man was hanged for the murder of a prison officer. The Board, and Greene, were concerned about a brief scene at the end showing the execution. Although he had asked for cuts elsewhere, Wheldon insisted that 'the play necessarily had to end with the man hanged. The scene as eventually transmitted was nothing if not abrupt and impersonal'. He agreed that 'instructions from the Board of Governors and the Director-General are not treated lightly' but argued that 'problems of this kind are not simply solved by simply cutting, and that the Board should not lightly dismiss what their servants carry out on their own, and the Board's, behalf'.²¹ Three months later, when the play was due to be repeated, Wheldon again stood firm. He said that to cut the execution, 'the last four shots in the final six seconds', would leave the ending 'amputated and raw'. Moreover, the incident must not allow the press to attack the corporation as 'timid and susceptible to pressures that ought better to be resisted'.²²

Wheldon again had to fight his corner against Greene and the Board over *Up the Junction*, another *Wednesday Play* transmitted in November 1965. While he broadly supported the play (an uninhibited portrait of working-class life in south London which contained a backstreet abortion scene) he was worried about alienating viewers. This was not a question of morality, 'but of giving consideration to the sensitivities of the audience, particularly of family groups'.²³ But when early the following year, Peacock, Controller of BBC1, proposed to include *Up the Junction* in a season of *Wednesday Play* repeats, Wheldon had no hesitation in agreeing. Most of the governors were opposed. Only one of them had seen the play so they were not judging it on its merits. Rather, they were worried about the offence it had caused some viewers. Both Greene and Normanbrook thought Wheldon should have referred such a sensitive matter upwards. Normanbrook said it was an error of judgment not to have done so.²⁴

According to Wheldon he received a reproof from Greene and considered resigning.²⁵ But he defended the play robustly before the Board, saying that excluding *Up the Junction* from the season of repeats would have given rise to a major crisis of confidence in the television service. The play was bawdy but it was a serious piece of work which had drawn a large and appreciative audience.²⁶ In the event the BBC, and

Wheldon, had the outcome decided for them when the chocolate factory where part of *Up the Junction* was filmed said it would sue if the play was shown again. The BBC announced that it was cancelling the repeat 'for legal reasons'.

Where Wheldon remained unshakeable was over distinguishing fact and fiction in dramatic programmes. Tony Parker had tape-recorded the experiences of five women prisoners and put them in a book. The producer, Tony Garnett, and director, Roy Battersby, decided to turn it into a *Wednesday Play* with five actresses, who had read and absorbed the material, being interviewed on camera by Parker. It was shot early in 1967. Sydney Newman, the Head of Drama, was unsure and referred it up to Wheldon, who was 'very bothered'. He thought viewers who switched on casually could be deceived into thinking it was the prisoners themselves speaking and he stopped the film.²⁷ It was transmitted two years later, in a features rather than a drama slot, with a clear message that the prisoners were played by actresses.

Although ten years younger than Wheldon, David Attenborough joined the BBC in the same year (1952) as a trainee talks producer after reading natural sciences at Cambridge and a brief spell in educational publishing. Wheldon's and Attenborough's careers ran along similar lines. Producers who became outstanding performers, both preferred making programmes to sitting behind desks and embraced management with reluctance. But once in an executive position, they quickly made an impact and rose so quickly that both were spoken of as future Directors-General. Like Wheldon, Attenborough found much of the 1950s television hidebound and unadventurous and became convinced that the medium was capable of better things. But, also like Wheldon, he was not by instinct an iconoclast.

Attenborough was Wheldon's choice to run BBC2, after Baverstock turned down the job and Peacock moved across to BBC1. Wheldon invited Attenborough to his house to make him the offer.²⁸ Adam, once again, appears to have played little part in what was an important reshuffle. Like Wheldon, Attenborough was brought in to provide stability after a period of managerial turmoil. He had a difficult inheritance. BBC2 had got off to a bad start. Taken off air by a power cut on its opening night, it was struggling to build an audience. The experiment of 'Seven Faces of the Week', a policy of themed nights conceived by Peacock and approved by Greene, had not

worked. But Attenborough had the advantage of being untainted by the initial failures.

His strategy was to use BBC2 to cover areas that the other channels, particularly BBC1, were ignoring. Although BBC2 was conceived as a minority channel, Attenborough insisted that minorities could be counted in millions. Nor did minority necessarily mean highbrow.²⁹ He started regular series on money, motoring, archaeology and jazz. In documentary he launched *One Pair of Eyes*, which in place of traditional BBC balance offered an outlet for personal views. He devised a floodlit rugby league competition and, when colour arrived, a snooker tournament *Pot Black*. Attenborough also wanted to expand the potential of the medium. To an extent he was building on what had already started. One of BBC2's early programmes was a 26-part treatment of *The Great War*, an unprecedented experiment in documentary. Before Peacock left he had commissioned *The Forsyte Saga*, which treated period drama on a similar scale. Both of these 'big programmes' were in black and white. By 1967 BBC2 would be in colour, and Attenborough was determined to exploit the new technology with a spectacular series. This was *Civilisation* (1969), a series of thirteen 50-minute programmes presented by the art historian, Sir Kenneth Clark.

Attenborough saw *Civilisation* as the television equivalent of H. G. Wells's *An Outline of History*, a work of popularisation by a serious writer which he had followed in weekly parts as a boy.³⁰ *Civilisation* was a critical success and it spawned similar projects, such as Jacob Bronowski's *The Ascent of Man* and Alistair Cooke's *America*. But if the series was a television landmark in its scale, erudition and pioneering use of colour, in content and approach it was traditional. Clark restricted himself to the art of Western Europe, as if it alone represented 'civilisation', and virtually ignored developments elsewhere. He stated his 'belief in the God-given genius of certain individuals'³¹ and played down the notion that art was the product of its society. When he made the series Clark was in his mid-sixties and his views had long since been formed. His lack of sympathy for modern abstract painting surfaced in the series, as did his dislike of many aspects of the modern world. In one programme he praised Balzac for defying fashionable opinion and said this 'should inspire us to defy all those forces which threaten our humanity: lies, tanks, tear-gas, ideologies, opinion polls, mechanisation, planners, computers'.³² It was ironic that Clark should be filming in

Paris in May 1968, at the height of the student demonstrations. Far from being influenced by the attitudes of the 1960s, *Civilisation* reinforced a conventional view of art history, Eurocentric and a steady progression of the work of great men (the only women mentioned were St Theresa of Avila and Elizabeth Fry). Raymond Williams saw echoes of another BBC2 epic, *The Forsyte Saga*: ‘a long last gathering-up by sad and polished minds, of an Edwardian world-view’³³. *Civilisation* typified Attenborough’s stewardship of BBC2. Although innovative in television terms his programmes did not challenge or shock as did *That Was the Week That Was*, *The War Game* or *Till Death Us Do Part*.

From 1967, when Peacock left for ITV, Attenborough’s opposite number at BBC1 was Paul Fox. After the more mercurial Peacock and Baverstock, he was another safe pair of hands. Unusually for a BBC manager he had not gone to university. Brought up by his mother after she was widowed early, he started as a sports journalist. Joining the BBC in 1950, he was editor of *Sportview* and *Panorama* before heading the Current Affairs department. Although the promotions came steadily, he was initially reluctant to accept them, feeling that he was not sufficiently well educated.³⁴ Unlike Attenborough he was not known for inspiring programme ideas but he was a shrewd and effective manager whose talent lay in making deals and designing schedules. Significantly, his 1969 lecture about his work as Controller of BBC1 was much more about scheduling and building audiences than individual programmes.³⁵ In a subsequent interview he said that his discussions with output departments were usually about money, facilities and programme lengths. He would ‘not dream of’ interfering in content.³⁶

The talent exodus: Hood, Baverstock (and Milne) and Peacock

Hood was unique among BBC executives in having been a member of the Communist Party, and although he had left it at the end of the Second World War he continued to have Marxist leanings. He was a Scot, educated at Edinburgh University, who had fought with the Italian partisans during the war and joined the BBC soon after it. A protégé of Greene, he moved up through running the World Service to become Head of News and succeeded Adam as Controller of Programmes in 1961. Adam soon thought

that he and Greene had chosen the wrong man. Hood was 'not a chairman, to stimulate discussion and sort out decisions. He was inscrutable in many ways, a solitary, not a committee man, an isolationist not a collaborationist'.³⁷ All the same his resignation in June 1964, in a scribbled note to Adam, was totally unexpected and subject to much speculation. Hood insisted it had nothing to do with the unhappy launch of BBC2 a few weeks before and he denied any rift with Adam.³⁸ Beyond that, he would only say that the ITV company, Rediffusion, where he was going as head of programmes (at a considerably higher salary), 'was a more compact organisation'.³⁹ The following Sunday, however, all three broadsheet newspapers reported that Hood resigned because of a dispute over the running of adult education. Hood had opposed plans to transfer control of adult education programmes from television professionals, such as himself, to the education department which had built its reputation on schools radio.⁴⁰ Adam later lent credence to this, revealing that he had supported Hood on the issue and had considered resigning himself.⁴¹

But there was probably more to it. After Hood had become Controller of Programmes, Baverstock and Peacock had been appointed to run BBC1 and BBC2 respectively and thus acquired considerable power bases of their own. The aggressive and outspoken Baverstock, moreover, was increasingly at odds with department heads such as Tom Sloan (light entertainment) and Newman (drama). Sloan had thoroughly disliked Baverstock's *TW3* and represented a type of programming, situation comedy and variety, for which Baverstock, in turn, had little time. Newman was determined to resist Baverstock's preference for audience-building serials over single plays.⁴² As Baverstock's immediate boss Hood had the task of trying to reconcile the two sides. Unable to assert this authority he decided to seek what he hoped would be the calmer environment of Rediffusion. It did not work out. Rediffusion sacked him after six months.

Hood's departure left BBC Television with a management crisis. For the time being Adam combined Hood's job with his own but what became known as 'the Baverstock problem' remained. Baverstock was one of the most gifted people in television, full of energy and ideas and, as his record with *Tonight* and *TW3* had shown, willing to break with the old ways and risk offence. Under Greene, who also had a

sense of mischief and was not afraid (at least once Pilkington was out of the way) to take on authority, Baverstock's career should have prospered. After Hood went he expected promotion but Greene stalled. After an interregnum of several months, Hood's job was revived and offered to Wheldon. He said he would only take it if the Baverstock problem was resolved. Greene told Wheldon to do it. Wheldon had great respect and affection for Baverstock, a fellow Welshman, but thought that he was doing the wrong job. He proposed switching Baverstock with Peacock but Baverstock regarded running BBC2 as a demotion. He turned down other offers, including heading a new programmes unit and running the Paris office, and, at 41, left the BBC. Bernard Levin, who broke the story, wrote that 'a sensational "palace revolution" at the BBC has resulted in the ousting of Donald Baverstock, the most dynamic and talented man the corporation has thrown up since the war'.⁴³ Milne, who had risen with Baverstock as his number two on *Highlight*, *Tonight* and *TW3*, thought he had been shabbily treated and resigned with him.⁴⁴

Having lost two of its brightest young men the BBC was soon to lose a third. Despite the apparent handicaps of being a grammar school boy who attended the London School of Economics and not Oxbridge, Peacock joined the BBC as a trainee producer on the same day as Attenborough in 1952. He rose rapidly, editing *Panorama* and then Television News, before, at 34, being appointed to oversee the launch of BBC2. From there he became Controller of BBC1 but when, in 1967, the ITV franchises came up for renewal, Peacock joined the consortium which successfully bid for the London weekend contract. According to Adam, Peacock had got itchy feet. He was not prepared to stay at the BBC and wait for 'dead man's shoes'.⁴⁵ He may have been too impatient. London Weekend Television was criticised for not fulfilling its extravagant promises and Peacock was sacked as managing director after barely a year.

Conclusion

This section began with two questions. The first was the extent to which the management of the BBC in the 1960s furthered Greene's liberal revolution. Adam, who by virtue of his position was the most prominent figure in television management, was a loyal follower who kept his nose clean. Wheldon, more publicly voluble but less in awe

of Greene, managed change pragmatically, trying to encourage young talent such as Watkins but worried about how far to let it go. Attenborough was the most innovative manager, but his programmes were more significant for pushing out the boundaries of television itself than engaging with debates and divisions in British society. Fox was concerned less with programme content than getting the mix of programmes right. Overall, it can be concluded, management was not the prime engine of change.

The second question is why the BBC was unable to keep some of its best talent. Part of the answer comes down to personalities. Hood was too detached to be a manager and Baverstock lacked the necessary emollience. Peacock, despite his rapid promotions, wanted more than the BBC could offer. There is a more general consideration. While Greene encouraged iconoclasm from the top, and output departments supplied it from below, there had to be stability in between. The management of the corporation had to run smoothly. Wheldon and Attenborough were better suited to this task than more brilliant but wayward figures such as Baverstock.

Notes

1. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Oral History Transcript. Sir Huw Wheldon interviewed by Frank Gillard, 1978.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Alasdair Milne, *DG: The Memoirs of a British Broadcaster* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), p.39.
5. Obituary of Adam, *The Times*, 19 October 1978.
6. Adam became more outspoken after leaving the BBC, with a series of newspaper articles in which he gave a trenchant account of the Greene era (*Sunday Times*, 9, 16, 23, 30 March 1969). Asa Briggs says the articles were Adam's 'revenge' for having to leave before he wanted to, though he was already nine months past the normal retiring age of 60. *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, vol V: Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p 393. Although Adam praised Greene's achievements as Director-General he claimed that Greene had left the BBC 'in a more parlous state that it has probably ever been'. Greene,

who retired as Director-General in the month the articles appeared, said they gave 'an entirely false picture' (*Daily Telegraph*, 31 March 1969) though used with care they are a useful source.

7. Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
8. Milne, op cit, p 38.
9. Ned Sherrin, *A Small Thing - Like an Earthquake* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p 83.
10. Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), p 217.
11. Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
12. Paul Ferris, *Sir Huge: The Life of Huw Wheldon* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990), p 174.
13. BBC WAC R143/30: Oral History Transcript. Charles Curran interviewed by Leonard Miall, January 1978.
14. *Sunday Times*, 30 March 1969.
15. Philip Purser, *Done Viewing* (London: Quartet Books, 1992), pp 80, 120.
16. *The Times*, 19 October 1978.
17. Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ferris, op cit, p 190.
21. BBC WAC T16/62/4: Huw Wheldon to Kenneth Adam, 27 April 1965.
22. BBC WAC T16/62/4: Wheldon to Adam, 12 July 1965.
23. BBC WAC: Minutes of the Weekly Programme Review, 10 November 1965.
24. BBC WAC R1/34/2: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 9 June 1966.
25. Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
26. BBC WAC R1/34/2: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 23 June 1966.
27. Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
28. David Attenborough, *Life on Air* (London: BBC Books, 2002), pp 200-201.
29. David Attenborough, 'BBC2', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, fourth series no 6, 16 March 1966.
30. Attenborough, *Life on Air*, op cit, pp 212-213.

31. Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (London: BBC and John Murray, 1969), p 347. The text closely follows the television scripts.
32. Ibid, p 320.
33. *The Listener*, 20 March 1969, reprinted in Alan O'Connor, ed, *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings* (London: Routledge, 1989), p 57.
34. Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
35. Paul Fox, 'This is BBC1', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, seventh series no 4, 19 February 1969.
36. Joan Bakewell and Nicholas Garnham, *The New Priesthood* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), pp 236-37.
37. *Sunday Times*, 23 March 1969.
38. *Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 1964.
39. *Daily Mail*, 2 June 1964.
40. *The Observer*, *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 June 1964.
41. *Sunday Times*, 16 March 1969.
42. Tracey, op cit, pp 254-55.
43. *Daily Mail*, 25 February 1965.
44. Milne, op cit, p 44.
45. *Sunday Times*, 23 March 1969.

3. A FRAGILE HARMONY: GREENE AND THE GOVERNORS

Introduction

Sir Michael Swann, BBC Chairman from 1973 to 1980, summarised the functions of the Board of Governors under four headings.¹ First, it appointed the Director-General and approved (and had the right to reject) his choice of senior managers. Secondly, it had the role of management consultants, standing outside the ‘everyday rush and bustle’ and thinking about the organisation. The Board’s third role ‘of protecting the broadcasters against undue pressure from society, and primarily against pressure from politicians and governments’ will be examined in sections on Mary Whitehouse and Harold Wilson.

This leaves what Swann called the ‘most important’ function, the oversight of programmes. Swann declared that ‘the Board, and senior management, can only work by trusting the people who make the programmes and relying on the well-established BBC principle that producers refer upwards if in doubt’. There were, nevertheless, three ways in which the Board exercised oversight of programme output. First, it was the apex of the BBC’s internal referral system. If the Director-General was doubtful about a programme or some facet of it, he consulted with the Board and the Chairman and the Board had the right to forbid a programme. Secondly, the Board’s regular reviews of programmes enabled senior management to get an idea of its thinking. Finally, the Board could express an attitude, and help to create a climate of opinion, in broad matters of programme policy

This section concentrates on the Board’s overseeing of programmes, which in turn helped to shape and define its relationship with Greene as Director-General. It will stop at 1967, when Lord Normanbrook died and was replaced by Lord Hill. Greene claimed to have close and fruitful relationships with Normanbrook and his predecessor, Sir Arthur fforde. This closeness disappeared under Hill, whose relations with Greene are examined in Chapter VI.

Negotiating change: fforde and Normanbrook

It has been argued that the governors of the BBC, by virtue of their age and social background, were unrepresentative of tastes and attitudes of the mass of the viewing

public, which was not only younger but mostly drawn from the lower end of the social scale. The make-up of the Board did not change much during the 1960s. The average age, which was almost 62 years at the start of the decade, only fell significantly in 1968, when it was 57.3, and in 1969, Greene's last year, when it dropped to 56.6.² The mix of academics, business and professional people and public servants, most educated at public school and Oxbridge, was broadly the same, and though there was one trade unionist, both Dame Florence Hancock (who served until she was 68) and Dame Anne Godwin (who did not retire until she was 70) were on the moderate wing of the movement. There was a reasonable presumption that people from such backgrounds would tend to favour traditional values rather than embrace radical change.

Yet during the 1960s many of these values, such as deference to authority, whether political or religious, and rigid codes of sexual behaviour, were being questioned as never before and this was finding its way into BBC programmes. Consequently, as Greene admitted, 'the governors take more interest in our programmes than they ever did before, partly because nowadays so many of our programmes are controversial, pioneering'.³ Greene insisted that his relations with the governors, and particularly the chairmen, over this turbulent period, were, at least up to 1967, exceptionally good. Of fforde he said: 'I have never known anybody in my life for whom I had such an affection and respect and I was desperately unhappy when he had to retire early in January 1964 on grounds of ill-health'.⁴ When fforde left the BBC for the last time, Greene was in tears.⁵ Sir Ian Jacob, Greene's predecessor, voiced similar sentiments, saying he became 'devoted' to fforde.⁶ Greene described Normanbrook as 'just about as remarkable a chairman as fforde, so I had great good luck for my first seven and a half years ... there were some sticky members of the Board but on the whole I had very good fortune'.⁷

Greene said the basis of the relationship between the Board and the Director-General was an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Neither should do anything behind the other's back and it was important that they should be in constant touch. Greene met fforde and Normanbrook twice a week, their offices were close together and they shared secretaries (Hill pointedly moved his office and brought in his own secretary). Greene claimed to have kept the Board more closely in touch than Jacob, by giving

access to papers and talking to them about programmes and programme ideas. But he conceded that this did give them a chance to interfere more, citing the Baldur von Schirach episode (see below).⁸

The most serious issue for Greene and the Board during this period was *That Was the Week That Was*. Some of the governors became unhappy about the personal vilification of public figures and ‘smut’ and sought assurances that these would be attended to before the second season began in the autumn of 1963. These assurances were given but not entirely kept. Greene became ‘increasingly concerned about the attitude of the Board, particularly Sir James Duff [the Vice-Chairman] who I knew was getting near to possible resignation on this issue’. Laid up with flu in November 1963, Greene decided the programme should come off at the end of the year instead of continuing into the spring as planned. ‘Any sort of resignation from the Board of Governors would have done immense damage to the BBC.’ When Greene announced his decision to the Board ‘there was a deep sigh of relief around the table’⁹. The official reason for the cancellation was that 1964 was a general election year and the programme could damage the BBC’s political impartiality. Although Greene said this was ‘not completely mendacious’ (though the election did not come until October) the attitude of the governors was the decisive factor.

Overall, during fforde’s time as Chairman, there is no evidence to contradict Greene’s claim of a close and harmonious relationship, despite the profound differences in outlook and attitude between the two men. As a public school headmaster fforde had been positioned in the social elite, and he was a committed Christian with a traditional view of religion and morality. Greene was an agnostic, in religion and everything else, and determined that the BBC should engage with the scepticism about established institutions and attitudes which increasingly characterised the 1960s. Two factors may help to explain this meeting of two different minds. One is that during the first two and a half years of Greene’s Director-Generalship much of the BBC’s effort was taken up with arguing its case to the Pilkington Committee, and on this Greene and fforde were at one. Secondly, while not abandoning what he saw as unshakeable principles, fforde was prepared to accept that society was changing and that BBC programmes must express this.

He set out his thoughts in *What Is Broadcasting About?* (1963), a pamphlet of which 400 copies were printed for private circulation.¹⁰ He described it as a personal view of broadcasting from one 'whose presuppositions are Christian'. By its very nature, he conceded, broadcasting must be in a constant and sensitive relationship with the moral condition of society. Broadcasters had a responsibility they could not evade. But it was not an answer to claim simply to hold up a mirror to society. What was the mirror to reflect? The best and worst, with complete indifference and without comment? To change or to reinforce? He went on: 'That this is a time when many of the standards by which people have hitherto lived are often questioned is not in itself regrettable. But the questions should be fairly put and fairly answered. If, in rejecting the standards by which society has hitherto lived, we put bad standards, or none, in their place, then the question will not have been fairly put but prejudiced for ill.'

On the programme-maker's responsibilities, fforde said that 'a safe line would avoid trouble by a kind of negative discipline and tend to deaden independence and liveliness. On the other hand, a liberalism which created at all widely an impression of irresponsibility, or an absence of standards, would jeopardise the unique ... enormously valuable freedom of the BBC'. It was a 'precarious balance'.

Broadcasting could show humanity to humanity in a living way and very often did so. The 'exchange of courteous knowledge of each other' was part of our good and as examples he cited 'some episodes' of *Z Cars* and *Steptoe and Son* and the cartoonist Timothy Birdsall 'taking a line for a walk' on *That Was the Week That Was*. But while programmes might be 'critical of various aspects of the human situation' they also had a responsibility to show 'the continuing human aspiration towards whatever things are true, honest, just, pure ...'. He was particularly thinking of plays. Writers were bound to reflect moments when humanity was caught in a moment of inhumanity, but the 'deliberately nihilistic and ugly' should not be encouraged.

On the most controversial area he had to deal with as Chairman, fforde wrote: 'Satire as a vehicle for a sincere attack on humbug, as in *That Was the Week That Was*, provided ... it can keep itself clear of personal venom, adolescent ineptitudes, irrelevant cynicism and attacks on people who, by their positions ... are not in a position defend themselves, has a clear part to play in the human situation'. But its success would depend on showing not merely what it was attacking but what it was defending and

affirming.

fforde's pamphlet can be seen as an honest and thoughtful attempt to come to terms with changes in society, and in broadcasting, to which he would not naturally be sympathetic. But it was a limited and qualified concession. In particular, his argument that while programmes should show moments of inhumanity the positive side must prevail is an essentially conservative position. The contrary view is that the ugly side of life needs to be shown so that it can be addressed and possibly changed for the better.

Between fforde's retirement in January 1964 and Normanbrook being announced as his successor in April, there emerged what became known as the 'curb Greene' campaign. It started with a story in the *Birmingham Post*, that the government thought Greene had become too powerful and was looking for a strong chairman to take control. The national press took up the story, which was, however, denied by 10 Downing Street and the Post Office.¹¹ According to Greene the story originated with Ray Mawby, the Assistant Postmaster-General, but Greene was assured that the Cabinet had no part in it.¹² Writing a few months later, Reginald Bevens, the Postmaster-General at the time, suggested that Mawby, on his own initiative, had 'flown this kite' at a BBC party and the BBC had leaked it to the press. Bevens, at any rate, was at one with his junior minister. He complained about 'the apparent inability of the BBC governors to exercise any real influence' and said that the real power was wielded by Greene and the top professionals. The only answer was a stronger and more assertive BBC Board.¹³

Asked on his appointment about the 'curb Greene' story Normanbrook was diplomatic but dismissive: 'I would not have thought the BBC needed a particularly strong man - but I hope I won't be a weak chairman. I have no mandate to "curb" the Director-General and I don't go in with the idea of knocking him about. We will work on a friendly basis - our backgrounds are very different - and I hope we can supplement each other's experience.' Normanbrook said his television tastes were 'pretty catholic'. He enjoyed the BBC's sports coverage, as well as *Z Cars* and *Maigret*. He found *That Was the Week That Was* (which had ended the previous December) 'interesting and amusing' and said he would like to see something of the sort return to the BBC.¹⁴

Normanbrook started as a grammar school boy (in Wolverhampton) before following the orthodox route to the top of the civil service by winning a scholarship to Oxford and reading Classics. After 13 years in the Home Office he became Principal Private Secretary to Sir John Anderson, Lord Privy Seal and Home Secretary, and was Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Reconstruction during later years of the war. In 1947 he was appointed Secretary of the Cabinet, a post he held until his retirement in 1962, combining it from 1956 with the office of Head of the Home Civil Service. He served four Prime Ministers, Labour and Conservative, and declared: 'I am not a political personality. I'm almost non-political'.¹⁵ The contrast with Greene went further than career background. Where Greene, the journalist, courted and relished publicity, Normanbrook, the civil servant, had operated away from the public eye, though as Chairman of the BBC during a period of intense controversy he was reluctantly pushed into it. By temperament Normanbrook was austere, correct and reserved. Greene enjoyed making mischief.

The grey area in BBC management was the division of responsibility between the governors on the one hand and the executive, led by the Director-General, on the other. In a lecture in 1965 Normanbrook sought to clarify it.¹⁶ He said that in theory the Board was concerned with policy and the Director-General and his staff with execution. But 'in the BBC, as in other large organisations, no hard and fast line can be drawn between a body of persons concerned only with formulating policy and another body concerned only with carrying it out'. Minor policy decisions must be taken below Board level, if only because of the need for speedy executive action. Conversely, the Board must take executive decisions on matters of outstanding political or public importance. Within the BBC the ultimate level of decision, even executive decision, was the Board of Governors.

Normanbrook thus defended the right of the Board to cancel an appearance by Ian Smith, Prime Minister of Rhodesia, on the current affairs programme, *24 Hours*, on 8 October 1965. The invitation to Smith, who was in London for talks with the British government, had come from the Current Affairs Group. Paul Fox, Head of the Group, protested about the decision, saying that the only criterion by which news programmes should be guided was that of news values. In doing so he cited Greene's defence of a BBC interview with Georges Bidault, the former French Prime Minister, who had been

accused of plotting against the state.¹⁷ Normanbrook, however, argued that the Rhodesian talks were at a delicate stage and that the BBC should not risk inflaming a potentially dangerous situation. Besides, Smith's views had been fully reflected in other BBC programmes. Apart from the issue of free speech, Normanbrook's action raised the question of whether the Chairman had the power to make executive decisions. Greene had been abroad when the invitation to Smith was withdrawn but he conceded that Normanbrook had been constitutionally correct.¹⁸

Normanbrook said it was impractical for anybody, including the Board, to approve all programmes before they were broadcast. A large measure of discretion must be left with individual producers and with those exercising immediate supervision over them. However they operated within a framework of general guidance which partly arose from the Board, which discussed recent programmes at its meetings and passed down comments. Such comments were not purely negative or restrictive. The Board was not seeking to limit the freedom of programme planners but to ensure that their responsibility was enhanced by the Board's guidance and encouragement. Normanbrook conceded that the control exercised by the governors was mainly by retrospective review, by praise or blame after the event.

It was where that review was not retrospective that caused the potential rift between the Board and the Director-General. *The War Game*, Peter Watkins's film about a nuclear attack on Britain, prompted worries at the production level and, in accordance with BBC practice, it was referred upwards, eventually reaching the very top. It was unusual for the Director-General, let alone the Chairman, to see a programme before transmission but both Greene and Normanbrook attended a preview. Normanbrook argued that on an executive decision of such importance the Board was entitled to have the final say, even if this meant overruling the Director-General. As with the Ian Smith episode, Greene was abroad when Normanbrook decided that the film should not be shown but the two men were in agreement. According to Greene Normanbrook 'did not feel as strongly as I did'¹⁹ though with hindsight Normanbrook regretted that he had not stopped the programme at the script stage, sparing the corporation 'a lot of embarrassment'²⁰

If it was unusual for the Chairman to see a programme in advance, it was even

rarer for the entire Board to do so. But *Matador*, a documentary about a young Spanish bullfighter narrated by Alan Whicker, touched a nerve. Here was another example of an initiative coming 'from below' (the idea was Whicker's) which challenged accepted practice and had to negotiate its acceptability. It had been BBC policy not to show bullfighting on television because the cruelty would distress many viewers. If the cruelty was toned down there was a danger of glamorising. Because the film raised a policy issue it would have to be referred up to the Board. In March 1966 Normanbrook saw it with Greene and was so revolted that he wished it had not been made. Greene was disturbed by some scenes, but thought it was a brilliant documentary which could be shown late in the evening with an advance warning.²¹ The Board saw the film in April and opinions were divided. The eventual decision was that the film could be shown as one of two programmes marking the thirtieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, but there must be no pre-publicity and the editorial matter in *Radio Times* should be concise and not apologetic. Greene considered it 'a considerable concession' on the Board's part.²² In *Radio Times* the documentary was described as factual and objective. '*Matador* does not whitewash bullfighting. It shows as much of the inevitable cruelty as is necessary for the sake of accuracy. Those who feel unable to face this aspect of Spanish life should not watch.'²³ The film went out on 29 July 1966, had an audience of eight million and achieved a high reaction index of 70.²⁴

For Greene the issue which caused the greatest friction between himself and the Board was whether the BBC should grant screen time to a Nazi war criminal. Baldur von Schirach, the former head of the Hitler Youth, had been released from the prison sentence imposed at the Nuremberg trials and agreed to be interviewed on *24 Hours*. There would be no fee, Greene having rejected an 'exorbitant' demand for £500 from von Schirach's agent. Confirmation of von Schirach's willingness to appear was conveyed to Greene while he was giving his regular report to the Board on 6 October 1966. Although he did not consider that it was a matter for the governors, Greene decided to inform them and 'all hell broke loose'. His recollection is that several governors objected strongly to the interview and Normanbrook joined them. Two governors who normally supported Greene, Glanmor Williams and Robert Lusty, were

absent. Normanbrook took a count of heads and the majority were in favour of the interview not taking place.

Greene was left with the embarrassment of telling the programme makers to cancel the interview without mentioning that it was a Board decision. He later told Normanbrook he had never been so close to resignation. He argued that as a correspondent in Nazi Germany before the war he had the right to feel more strongly about an interview with a Nazi than any member of the Board. Normanbrook's retort was that it was Greene's fault for mentioning the programme. Greene had to concede that the Chairman was 'absolutely right'.²⁵ Charles Curran, Greene's successor, later wrote: 'The public thought that Sir Hugh, a bold editor and a great publicist, was the dominant force. That was not the reality. The Chairmen were in charge on the major issues.'²⁶

Greene insisted that relations with Normanbrook were good to the end. But there are suggestions that Normanbrook had decided by 1966 that the Director-General's libertarian attitudes were making too many waves for the BBC and he should go, with dignity, at some convenient time. Curran, who as BBC Secretary was close to both men, said Normanbrook had doubts about how long Greene should continue: 'He hadn't come to the point of saying he should go by a particular time, but he had come to the point of saying, "perhaps we should consider when he does go."'²⁷ Lusty recalled that Normanbrook was becoming worried by complaints about BBC blunders in religion and good taste ²⁸ and Normanbrook told Hill that he 'could do nothing with Greene'.²⁹ Glanmor Williams, the national governor for Wales, recalled extreme disquiet about Greene by some governors at a dinner he (Williams) attended in 1965.³⁰ Greene may have been reprieved by Normanbrook's poor health. He was, for instance, too ill to attend any Board meetings between December 1965 and April 1966. But Greene's biographer says there is no hard evidence that Normanbrook wanted Greene to go and Greene himself denied it.³¹

Conclusion

Given that he differed so much from both fforde and Normanbrook in background and attitude, Greene's relationship with them was surprisingly good. Although not naturally

sympathetic to the more liberal attitudes which found their way into BBC programmes, fforde and Normanbrook tried to be open-minded and conflicts between the Board and the executive were few. On the most contentious programmes, such as *That Was the Week That Was* and *The War Game*, it was however fortunate that the Director-General and the Chairman came to broadly the same conclusion. Normanbrook appears to have been the stronger of Greene's first two Chairmen, and his assertion that the Board had the right to the final say on important executive decisions could have thrown the relationship with the Director-General into disarray. In the event, disagreements were contained. Greene prevailed on *Matador* but had to concede defeat over von Schirach. If Normanbrook had decided that Greene should go, Normanbrook's illness and death may have prevented a potentially serious conflict.

Notes

1. Sir Michael Swann, 'The Responsibility of the Governors', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, ninth series no 1, 29 October 1973.
2. Asa Briggs, *Governing the BBC* (London: BBC, 1979), pp 266-70.
3. Hugh Greene interviewed by Kenneth Harris, *Observer*, 22 March 1964, reprinted in Harris, *Conversations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), p 100.
4. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Oral History Transcript, Hugh Greene interviewed by Frank Gillard, 19 March 1977.
5. Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), p 234.
6. BBC WAC R143/73/1: Oral History Transcript, Sir Ian Jacob interviewed by Frank Gillard, 6 October 1976.
7. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Greene Oral History Transcript, op cit.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. BBC WAC Special Collections S138.
11. *Sunday Times*, 15 March 1964.
12. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Greene Oral History Transcript, op cit.

13. Reginald Bevins, *The Greasy Pole: A Personal Account of the Realities of British Politics* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), pp 116-18.
14. *Daily Express*, 2 April 1964.
15. Ibid.
16. Lord Normanbrook, 'The Functions of the BBC's Governors', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, fourth series no 3, 15 December 1965.
17. Greene, letter to *The Times*, 7 March 1963.
18. BBC WAC R1/33/2: Board of Governors Minutes, 21 October 1965.
19. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Greene Oral History Transcript, op cit.
20. BBC WAC T16/679/2: Normanbrook to Greene, 28 February 1966.
21. BBC WAC R1/34/1: Board of Governors Minutes, 2 March 1966.
22. BBC WAC T56/257/1: Kenneth Adam, Director of Television, to Huw Wheldon, Controller of Programmes, 27 May 1966.
23. *Radio Times*, 21 July 1966, p 43.
24. BBC WAC T56/257/1: *Matador*, Audience Research Report, 22 August 1966.
25. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Greene Oral History Transcript, op cit.
26. Charles Curran, *A Seamless Robe: Broadcasting Philosophy and Practice* (London: Collins, 1979), p 257.
27. BBC WAC R143/30: Oral History Transcript. Charles Curran interviewed by Leonard Miall, January 1978.
28. Quoted in Michael Tracey, *The Production of Political Television* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p165.
29. Lord Hill, *Behind the Screen: The Broadcasting Memoirs of Lord Hill* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974), p 142.
30. Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), p 250.
31. Ibid, p 250.

4. THE BBC AND THE PILKINGTON REPORT

Introduction

Hugh Greene's first two years as Director-General were dominated by the Pilkington Inquiry. He personally organised and argued the corporation's case, overseeing the mass of written evidence to the Pilkington Committee and appearing regularly to give oral evidence, while campaigning tirelessly through public lectures and speeches and private lobbying of politicians. It was an assignment he relished and for which he was well qualified. He wrote later: 'I approached the event as a problem in psychological warfare: define one's objectives, rally one's friends, rattle one's enemies, state one's case with the utmost conviction, persuasiveness and clarity.' He could not have done the job without his previous experience in the BBC German Service and in Malaya.¹

Greene's approach reveals much about his attitude to people and institutions he disliked. Paul Fox, a BBC executive under Greene, later wrote: 'It was part of Hugh Greene's tactics to scorn ITV. It was not just the psychological warrior in him that made him try to lower ITV's reputation. He enjoyed mischief and this was a mischievous task.' Noting that some aspects of ITV, such as its political coverage, entertainment shows and drama, were 'years ahead' of the BBC, Fox added: 'Just because Greene didn't like Sir Robert Fraser [Director-General of the Independent Television Authority] he shunned ITV and deliberately underestimated its achievements.'² Greene pointedly referred to the BBC's competitor as 'commercial' television, arguing that the truly 'independent' broadcasting authority was the BBC. He only agreed to abandon this, and instruct his staff likewise, after representations from Fraser's successor, Lord Hill.³

This section will first examine the BBC's argument to the Pilkington Committee as articulated by Greene, drawing particularly on his public statements which underlined the key points of the written evidence but in often punchier terms. There will follow an analysis of Pilkington's response and recommendations, and the reaction to the report in the press and at Westminster. Behind much of the argument to Pilkington lay the competition for audiences, and there will be an examination of how, and why, the BBC was able to fight back to parity.

Broadcasting as public service: the BBC's case

The BBC's submission to Pilkington set out a number of objectives. It wanted a second television channel and to have the go-ahead for a switch from 405 to 625 lines and the introduction of colour. It argued for an increase in the licence fee, from £4 to £6, to pay for these developments and for the continuation of the licence as the main source of income. The BBC's case was based on the assertion that the public service model which it represented was superior to that of the rival commercial channel in serving all sections and interests in society and not just those of the majority.

In his role as propagandist Greene revealed himself not as the iconoclast on which his later reputation rested but as a traditionalist wedded to long standing BBC principles. He even quoted John Reith, the first Director-General, and founder of the paternalistic BBC against which Greene in many other ways rebelled. Moreover the seeds of Greene's pitch to Pilkington can be discerned long before the Committee was announced (on 13 July 1960) or before Greene had emerged as a serious candidate to succeed Jacob as Director-General. Indeed had Jacob stayed on to face the Pilkington Inquiry it is hard to think that he would have deviated greatly from Greene.

Greene's key argument lay in the difference between the public service and commercial systems. In 1958 he said: 'The BBC is not competing with commercial television on commercial television's own terms. But because of its nature commercial television *is* competing with the BBC. It has to compete with the BBC for audiences or it will fail in its task. It cannot afford to put on adventurous programmes for minorities. The BBC can. Commercial television is an adjunct of industry. It exists to sell goods and if it does not sell goods it will die.' As evidence of the BBC's commitment to minorities, Greene cited a World Theatre season of classic plays, which had drawn audiences of between 4.5 million (for *Henry V*) and 9.5 million for Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. While these figures were 'not tremendous', they were a great encouragement to the BBC in its policy of going its own way. Furthermore, a 'minority' of this size might even one day become a 'majority'.⁴

For the next four years or so, until the Pilkington Report was published in June 1962, Greene repeated and elaborated these key points. In April 1959 he argued that any system of broadcasting which was financed by advertising revenue must constantly strive 'to reach the largest possible audience for everything' and called it a frightening,

and inevitable, characteristic of the system. He went on: 'It is the denial of one of the fundamental principles of democracy, respect for the rights and interests of minorities.' Greene quoted a recent analysis of the proportion of 'serious, thought-provoking programmes transmitted in peak hours' (between 7pm and 10.30pm) and claimed that the BBC had 34% to ITV's 10%. In a veiled reference to ITV's then big lead in audience share, he observed that 'it is not the best and most intelligent programmes which tend to draw the biggest audience'.⁵

With the Pilkington Committee announced, Greene's tone became sharper. Disputing Fraser's claim that commercial television, like the BBC, was a form of public service, Greene repeated that 'commercial broadcasting in whatever form exists to sell goods and public service broadcasting to serve the public'. If the cash register came to be regarded as the test of success, 'one could say goodbye to minority interests and the whole flavour of life in this country would be in for a sad change'. Belief in the importance of minority interests lay behind the BBC's claim for a second television channel.⁶ In presenting its case for a second television channel the BBC could point to radio, where the Home Service and the Light and Third Programmes enabled it to satisfy a range of tastes and interests.

In a later speech Greene attacked the concept of 'giving the public what it wants' and equated it with 'the tyranny of the ratings'. Ratings, he said, simply told us how many people watched a particular programme, not who the people were, why they watched or how much they enjoyed what they watched. Yet high ratings were often hailed as a triumph for democracy. But was the BBC not doing more for democracy if it sometimes, even quite often, gave great pleasure to a few people even at the cost of provoking many to switch off? Greene quoted Reith in the 1920s: 'He who prides himself on giving what he thinks the people want is often creating a fictitious demand for lower standards which he will then satisfy.'

Greene said broadcasters had a responsibility to experiment, to offer the public programmes from an always increasing range of subjects. Public taste was bound to be narrow if it was left to itself. He cited the surge of interest in archaeology due to the panel game *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* and the audience of three million for the Shakespeare history cycle, *An Age of Kings*. Such programmes 'came from a deliberate decision to disregard ratings as the sole guide to programme planning'. He added: 'I

shall, perhaps, be accused of paternalism and of imposing on the many the subjective judgments of a small group.' But broadcasting depended on such judgments.⁷

Greene attempted to put further distance between the BBC and ITV when he gave oral evidence to the Pilkington Committee. He said the BBC did not aim at a particular proportion of the television audience, but conceded that 'if we fell below a certain proportion, our claim to be the national instrument of broadcasting in this country would be impaired'. Noting that the current proportion was 40:60 in favour of ITV, he said that 'in view of the greater number of serious programmes we have in the main viewing hours [a constant BBC refrain when comparing itself to ITV] it is pretty satisfactory'. Asked why the BBC should put on serious programmes in peak hours when most viewers wanted to be entertained, Greene said it was then that most people were at home and it would be undemocratic to deprive very large sections of the public of a wide choice at this time. He cited the two to three million people who watched the arts programme, *Monitor*.

The gap between the BBC and ITV was further revealed when Greene was asked which programmes the BBC had not shown. Greene mentioned American imports, because of 'what we regard as excessive violence'. Kenneth Adam, the Director of Television Broadcasting, said these were mainly Westerns, such as *Rawhide* and *Have Gun, Will Travel*, but also the adventure series, *Route 66*. Greene added that 'we would not put on some of their [ITV's] give-away programmes and programmes which seemed to us to bring people into ridicule, such as *Candid Camera* [in which members of the public were subjected to secretly-filmed pranks]'.⁸ The implication was that ITV was operating at a lower level of taste. A further insight into the BBC's attitude towards its rival comes from Eric Maschwitz, the Head of Light Entertainment. Asked what his department might submit to the Pilkington Committee, he said that 'the happiest thing that has happened to us lately has been the reaction index of 74 scored by the last edition of *On the Bright Side* [a series starring the comedian, Stanley Baxter]. Two years ago satirical review seldom scored more than 50% and it must therefore be greatly encouraging that a tasteful, well-written, fairly sophisticated show such as Baxter's has become, should get the same kind of appreciation rating as Billy Cotton or *The Black and White Minstrel Show*'.

He went on: 'Add to this the impact of Michael Bentine (62) and Ron Moody

(65) and one is, I feel, justified in believing that popular taste in light entertainment is improving under the influence of BBC Television. Commercial TV dare very seldom risk such adventures into the “avant garde”; its peasant [sic] audience does not respond to adventure of this kind (which in any case is hard to present amidst a welter of interruptive advertisements).’⁹ The BBC’s message was that by eschewing violent Westerns and give-away shows, and encouraging light entertainment that was sophisticated and even avant-garde, it was taking a higher moral ground than its rival. There was even a hint of Reithian paternalism, of giving people what it thought was good for them.

The judgment of Pilkington

The Pilkington Committee was faced with two distinct philosophies of broadcasting and saw its task as having to negotiate between them. The BBC’s argument was that only a public service institution, free of commercial and governmental influence, could deliver programmes which served a range of interests, majority and minority. ITV’s retort was that it was providing programmes which large numbers of people enjoyed. Sir Robert Fraser described ITV as ‘people’s television’ and accused the BBC of being indifferent to the likes and dislikes of ordinary people.¹⁰

The report approached the debate by citing the dissatisfaction with television which had been expressed in several submissions. The common theme was that ‘programme items were far too often devised with the object of seeking, at whatever cost in quality or variety, the largest possible audience; and that, to attain this object, the items nearly always appealed to a low level of public taste. This was not, of course, to say that all items which attracted large audiences were poor. But in far too many the effect was to produce a passively acquiescent or even indifferent audience rather than an actively interested one. There was a lack of variety and originality, an adherence to what was “safe”; and an unwillingness to try challenging, demanding and, still less, uncomfortable subject matter’.

Against this, the report admitted, people watched undemanding programmes (which it characterised as ‘pap’) in large numbers, and this was put forward as their justification. In a free society, so the argument ran, this was what people freely chose. They did not have to watch; they could switch off. By these tests such programmes

were 'what the public wants' and to provide anything else was to impose on people what someone thought they ought to like.¹¹

The report conceded that there was a considerable place for items which all or most people enjoyed. But to say that the only way of giving people what they wanted was to give them these items was to imply that all individuals were alike. But no two were. It went on: 'Some of our tastes and needs we share with virtually everybody; but most - and they are often those which engage us most intently - we share with different minorities.' A service which catered only for majorities could not satisfy all the needs of the public.¹² Moreover, no one could say he was giving the public what it wanted unless the public knew the whole range of possibilities which television could offer. Some viewers might come to like only what they know. 'But it will always be true that, had they been offered a wider range from which to choose, they might and often would have chosen otherwise, and with greater enjoyment'.¹³ This was precisely the contention of Greene and the BBC.

The report therefore rejected the idea of giving the public what it wants as 'patronising and arrogant, in that it claims to know what the public is, but defines it as no more than the mass audience; and in that it claims to know what it wants, but limits its choice to the average of experience'. But equally patronising and arrogant was the notion that the broadcaster should 'give the public what he thinks is good for it'.¹⁴ Furthermore, television must engage with challenges to existing assumptions and beliefs and be ready and anxious to experiment, to show the new and unusual, to give a hearing to dissent. It must be willing to make mistakes; for if it did not, it would make no new discoveries.¹⁵

By this test, the Pilkington Committee concluded, ITV had largely failed. Its policy and structure had resulted in competition for large audiences, a kind of competition that was different from competition in good broadcasting. The report was critical of the triviality of ITV's programmes (but also some of the BBC's) and recommended that the ITA, not the companies, should be responsible for collecting advertising revenue and planning programmes. The committee decided that on its past record, and given its public service remit, the BBC was more likely to provide challenging and varied programming and recommended that it should have most of

what it had asked for: the second channel, a switch to 625 lines and colour, maintenance of the licence fee as the source of revenue and confirmation that it remained the main instrument of broadcasting in Britain.

For the BBC it was an almost total vindication and, looking back a few months later, Greene made a link between the corporation's endorsement by Pilkington and the more adventurous programmes which had followed. 'To have come through with success releases new energies - energies backed by all the thinking we have been forced to do about our responsibilities and our place in national life. So it was no coincidence that *That Was the Week That Was* came into existence at this particular moment and no coincidence that our programmes generally, from one angle or another, are trying to take a harder, franker look at "This Island Now" ...'¹⁶

Reaction in the press and at Westminster

If the BBC won the argument with Pilkington, the report had a generally hostile press. As a *Daily Mail* leader said: 'Few official reports have had so thorough a drubbing as that of the Pilkington Committee. Even newspapers which normally favour the BBC have denounced it.'¹⁷ The criticism came equally from 'serious' and 'popular' papers and from papers on the political left and right. The BBC tried to make a connection between press reaction to the report and newspaper holdings in the ITV companies.¹⁸ This might explain the hostility of the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Sketch*, which had substantial shares in ITV companies, but not that of the *Daily Telegraph*, which had none. A common charge was that the Pilkington Committee been too easy on the BBC and in attacking ITV, Pilkington was taking a high-minded attitude towards programmes that gave a lot of people pleasure.

As soon as the report was published, Sir William Haley, the former Director-General and now Editor of *The Times*, wrote to Greene: 'What a splendid vindication for the BBC. My warmest congratulations.'¹⁹ Haley's newspaper was more equivocal. Its leader said the contrast between the BBC and ITV was not nearly as black-and-white as the committee represented it. Nor did the report do full justice to improvements in areas such as political coverage which could be traced to the influence of the commercial companies.²⁰

The Guardian accepted Pilkington's analysis that the structure of commercial television had failed to achieve the purposes of good broadcasting. It doubted whether the government, 'already in trouble with its backbenchers on many other scores', would be brave enough to tackle the reconstruction of commercial television at the moment.²¹ Pilkington's other main supporter was the *Daily Express*, which suggested that ITA's profits should be used to offset the licence fee, which need not be increased and might gradually be abolished.²²

The *Financial Times* thought that the ITA had made a poor case by saying that television's primary duty was to mirror tastes and standards as they were. But 'there is a very real danger of taking paternalism too far, of discounting popular success and of providing uplift which in the last resort people do not want. Sir Harry Pilkington's statement yesterday that the committee was not out of touch must be respected, but it remains true that any group of middle-class people, as the committee was, have values which are bound to be different from those of the man in the street'.²³ The *Daily Telegraph* was blunter: 'It is a form of arrogance which saturates this amazing document, a haughty conviction that whatever is popular must be bad.'²⁴

The *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Herald*, both Labour-supporting papers, were among the report's fiercest critics. The *Mirror* said it was impossible not to conclude that the committee had been against the whole conception of independent television from the start. Public opinion - except that expressed by the vociferous few - had been rudely and crudely ignored.²⁵ The *Herald* said that whatever the Pilkington Committee might think, the public liked commercial television. Millions preferred it to the BBC. Yet their view had been swept aside.²⁶

There was little enthusiasm for the report among either of the main political parties. Iain Macleod, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, told Hardiman Scott, the BBC's Political Correspondent, that 'the majority of Conservative MPs had been irritated by the report'.²⁷ As for the Labour Party, 'there is a strong impression about that Labour may not be going to employ all its courage in fighting the Pilkington battle [i.e. supporting the report]. Never very far from their minds is the thought that the bulk of ITV viewers may also be the bulk of Labour voters'.²⁸ A meeting of the

Parliamentary Labour Party revealed sharp divisions. Christopher Mayhew, the party's broadcasting spokesman, made the strongest speech in favour of the report, but there was a sturdy defence of ITV from Woodrow Wyatt and from Richard Marsh, who said the Party should get away from its arrogant puritanism. The Shadow Cabinet was cautious and non-committal.²⁹ A week later Herbert Bowden, the Chief Whip, thought a majority of the Parliamentary party would accept the report, but not an increase in the licence fee which would bear most heavily on the less well-off.³⁰

The Conservative government eventually decided to grant most of what the BBC had wanted - the second channel, the switch to 605 lines and the go-ahead for colour - and although the £4 licence fee would stay, the government would no longer take back £1 in excise duty. But the government rejected Pilkington's most radical proposal, that the ITA, not the companies, should collect advertising revenue and commission the programmes.³¹ So the government steered a middle course, supporting the BBC but refusing to accept Pilkington's critique of ITV.³²

The BBC audience and the climb to parity

Despite the hostile press reaction the BBC could claim a substantial victory and it had another soon afterwards. In its evidence to Pilkington, the BBC had played down the importance of ratings. However, during the quarter from October to December 1962 the BBC, for the first time since ITV started, claimed a bigger share of the audience, 52% to 48%. Moreover, for the rest of the 1960s the split remained at broadly 50:50.³³ The TAM system used by ITV still gave ITV a clear lead. For the January-March 1963 quarter the BBC claimed a 50:50 split while TAM gave a 57:43 advantage to ITV.³⁴ On either measure, however, the huge advantage once enjoyed by ITV had significantly narrowed and this helped to defuse the criticism which had intensified following the Pilkington Report that the BBC was failing to cater for popular taste.

One reason for the BBC's climb to parity was that it was providing more programmes which in themselves attracted large audiences. According to the BBC's research, of the 'top 20' programmes for the week ended 17 November 1963, the BBC and ITV each had ten. Some of the BBC programmes, such as *Sportview*, *The Good Old Days* and *Dixon of Dock Green* went back to the 1950s and two, *The Defenders*

and *The Lucy Show*, were American imports. But there were large audiences for post-1960 dramas such as *Z Cars* (15.2 million), *Maigret* (12.25 million) and *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (11.75 million).³⁵ The BBC also scored heavily during the 1960s with situation comedies such as *Steptoe and Son* and *Till Death Us Do Part*.

As important, if not more so, was the way in which programmes were scheduled. Reith had deliberately avoided regular scheduling because he considered this would encourage lazy, non-stop listening.³⁶ Reith belonged to the radio era, but his attitude towards scheduling was echoed in television by Cecil McGivern, Controller of Programmes from 1950 to 1957. A disciple of Reithian paternalism, he 'sought to preserve the quality of surprise and sense of occasion by trying to arrange schedules that did not look the same week after week'.³⁷ But when ITV, drawing on American practice, built audiences by putting its popular programmes in regular peak-time slots, the BBC not only did the same but devised more subtle strategies.

One of these was to exploit the 'inheritance factor', the fact that one of the main ingredients in the size of any audience was the audience watching the programme which preceded it. Huw Wheldon gave the example of *Panorama*, which in 1965 was getting an average audience of six million. But when *Steptoe and Son* was put on immediately before it, *Panorama's* audience immediately rose to ten million. More generally, if the BBC could attract a large audience with a popular programme in the early evening, it was likely to keep much of that audience. For Wheldon scheduling was 'the main element in the battle to achieve an audience ratio that protected the BBC's financial foundation'.³⁸

Although the BBC was claiming audience parity, its own research suggested that many working-class people continued to see the corporation as they had done in the early years of ITV (see Chapter I). An analysis of viewing in February 1965 showed that upper middle-class people viewed BBC about twice as much as they viewed ITV, 66 to 34. Lower middle-class people also viewed BBC more than ITV (55:45). On the other hand working-class people, who accounted for over 70% of the population, divided their time in the ratio of BBC 39: ITV 61.³⁹

Notes

1. Hugh Greene, *The Third Floor Front: A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969), p 58.
2. *The Listener*, 22 September 1983, p 21.
3. BBC WAC T36/31/2: Memo from Greene, 19 March 1964. Greene told Hill they would stop using the expression 'as a sign of goodwill' though they regarded it as correct and objective. He instructed BBC staff that they should now speak of ITV (but not Independent Television).
4. BBC WAC T36/31/2: Speech to a Television Convention organised by the German Evangelical Academy for Radio and Television, 26 March 1958.
5. 'Two Threats to Broadcasting: Political and Commercial Control', speech to German businessmen in Bad Schwalbach, 18 April 1959. Reprinted as a supplement to *Ariel*, vol 4 no 5, May 1959.
6. Speech to the Manchester Luncheon Club, November 1960, reprinted in *The Third Floor Front*, op cit, pp 59-62.
7. 'The Broadcaster's Responsibility', speech at the Alfred I. Dupont Awards Foundation Dinner, Washington, 26 March 1962.
8. BBC WAC T16/326/3: BBC oral evidence to the Pilkington Committee, 5 September 1961.
9. BBC WAC T16/326/1: Maschwitz to Stuart Hood, Controller of Programmes, Television, 4 October 1960.
10. Speech to the Manchester Luncheon Club, May 1960, quoted in Greene, *The Third Floor Front*, op cit, pp 60-61.
11. *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting, 1960*. Cmnd. 1753 (HMSO, 1962), p 16, para 43.
12. Ibid, p 16, para 44.
13. Ibid, p 17, para 46.
14. Ibid, pp 17-18, paras 48, 49.
15. ibid, pp 19-20, para 53.
16. Speech to the Parliamentary Press Gallery, February 1963, quoted in *The Third Floor Front*, op cit, p 63.
17. *Daily Mail*, 29 June 1962.

18. BBC WAC R4/51/4: Lecture by L. G. Thirkell, Head of the BBC Secretariat, to the Polygon Club, 12 December 1962.
19. BBC WAC R4/51/1. Haley to Greene, 26 June 1962.
20. *The Times*, 27 June 1962.
21. *The Guardian*, 27 June 1962.
22. *Daily Express*, 27 June 1962.
23. *Financial Times*, 27 June 1962.
24. *Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 1962.
25. *Daily Mirror*, 27 June 1962.
26. *Daily Herald*, 27 June 1962.
27. BBC WAC R4/51/2: Scott to Hugh Greene, 5 July 1962.
28. BBC WAC R4/51/2: David Holmes, Assistant Parliamentary Correspondent, to Greene, 6 July 1962.
29. BBC WAC R4/51/2: Scott to Greene, 11 July 1962.
30. BBC WAC R4/51/3: Scott to Greene, 13 July 1962.
31. The government's response to Pilkington was set out in two White Papers, Cmnd. 1770, July 1962, and Cmnd. 1893, December 1962.
32. The wider implications of the report are examined in Jeffrey Milland, '“Courting Malvolio”: The Background to the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, 1960-62', *Contemporary British History*, vol 18 no 2 (Summer 2004), pp 76-102.
33. BBC WAC T16/301: BBC Audience Research. The figures are for viewers who had a choice of BBC and ITV. The BBC continued to quote them until 1964 when fewer than 2% of viewers were without access to both channels and the distinction was no longer useful.
34. Quoted in *Contrast*, Summer 1963, p 238.
35. BBC WAC T16/301: Guy Carr, Promotion Organiser, Television Enterprises, to General Manager, Television Enterprises, 5 December 1963.
36. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, 'Serving the Nation: Public Service Broadcasting Before the War', in Bernard Waites, et al, eds, *Popular Culture: Past and Present* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1981), p 185.
37. Peter Black, *The Biggest Aspidistra in the World* (London: BBC, 1972), p 209.

38. Huw Wheldon, 'Competition in Television', address to the Faculty of Royal Designers for Industry and the Royal Society of Arts, 26 April 1971.
39. R. J. E. Silvey, Head of BBC Audience Research, 'Profiles of the Viewing Audience', *BBC Handbook 1966*, pp 27-29.

III. SITES OF INNOVATION AND CONTROVERSY

1. A CREATIVE TREATMENT OF REALITY: RUSSELL AND WATKINS

Introduction

In his documentaries for the BBC culminating in *Royal Family* (which is discussed in Chapter IV) Richard Cawston was a self-effacing observer who let his subjects speak for themselves. Ken Russell and Peter Watkins, by contrast, brought a personal stamp to their work and challenged the conventional notion that documentary had to be objective and 'true'. Russell's early work for the arts programme, *Monitor*, not only sought to correct the programme's bias towards high rather than popular art but in his biographies of composers increasingly subverted television's traditional ways of tackling the lives and work of real people. Watkins, too, offered new approaches to representing reality, whether in reconstructing an eighteenth-century battle or imagining the aftermath of a nuclear war. Both men were recruited to the BBC by Huw Wheldon and he was chiefly responsible for confronting and mediating the challenges they presented.

Huw Wheldon, *Monitor* and Ken Russell

The germ of *Monitor* was contained in a memorandum by Kenneth Adam, Controller of Television Programmes, in March 1957. He asked Leonard Miall, the Head of Talks, to be thinking about 'a new magazine, perhaps covering a different range of subjects, which might be suitable for late-night viewing'. He mentioned *Panorama* and *Tonight* and said that 'if it has been done twice ... then there is no reason why it shouldn't be done a third time. I think it should be a highly sophisticated type of magazine, without necessarily appealing only to Third Programme types!'¹ Miall's response was 'that we have been thinking for some time about the possibility of a new programme on the lines of *The Critics*' (a weekly radio programme which reviewed the arts).² By June Adam had decided there should be a magazine on Sundays, 'to deal in alternate weeks with the arts and the theatre'³ and by July it became a weekly arts magazine with Catherine Dove, who had been working on *The Brains Trust*, appointed as producer. By

November Dove seemed firmly in charge, having ‘already given much thought to the questions of content, style and speakers’.⁴ But she was about to be downgraded in favour of Wheldon who was given ‘overall responsibility’ for the programme ‘and a title equivalent to that of executive producer’ (this became Editor). He would also be the ‘compere’. Dove was still the producer but number two to Wheldon.⁵ Wheldon had effectively pulled rank. Dove was 26 and had only just been promoted from production assistant to producer. Wheldon was in his early forties, senior to Dove in the Talks Department and with substantial experience as a producer and presenter. In the event Dove suffered a serious knee injury and dropped out. If Wheldon was a late recruit the title of the programme was decided even later. With less than a month to go the favoured option was *Periscope*.⁶

Wheldon had joined the BBC in 1952 as Publicity Officer. It was not a job he wanted but it got him into the corporation, which he did want, with the promise of a move after 18 months or so. At 35 he was significantly older than Donald Baverstock, Michael Peacock or David Attenborough, who started in television at around the same time, though he was to overtake them all on the executive ladder. The son of a solicitor who became a high-ranking civil servant, Wheldon went to the London School of Economics and planned to read for the Bar. But the Second World War intervened and he served almost throughout, rising to major and winning the Military Cross. He was Director of the Arts Council in Wales before organising events for the Festival of Britain. His promised promotion within the BBC came in 1954 when he became a senior talks producer. In that capacity he made a series about great battles featuring General Sir Brian Horrocks and with Robert Mackenzie, the political scientist, produced *Portraits of Power*, profiles of political leaders such as Hitler and Roosevelt. Both series were simple operations, essentially put together by Wheldon and a small secretarial staff. Against them he contrasted programmes such as *Sportview*, *Panorama* and *Tonight*, which had a powerful production team under strong command, combined studio work with outside filming and were backed by large budgets.⁷

Wheldon saw *Monitor* as the arts equivalent of *Panorama* and *Tonight*. It met his criterion for ‘a powerful production team under strong command’. The team included Peter Newington (who replaced Dove) and Nancy Thomas, two experienced

BBC producers, John Schlesinger, who moved across from *Tonight*, and talented young men recruited from outside, including Humphrey Burton, David Jones and, later, Melvyn Bragg. Wheldon, the former army major, provided the leadership. Although he said so himself, he ‘set the tone for the programme’ and ‘nothing was ever done on *Monitor* ... that I didn’t agree with from beginning to end ... nothing was done which I found boring or tedious or tiresome or meretricious or wrong and I only did things about things I admired’.⁸ By the end of 1958 when Russell joined, *Monitor* went out fortnightly on Sunday evenings, ran for 45 minutes and usually included three to four items. Part of the programme was on film and the remainder live in the studio. Its aim, in Wheldon’s words, was ‘to illuminate the relationship between the artist and the product, or the artistic institution and its output’.⁹ He brought to the task a set of principles and attitudes, all of which, to a greater or lesser extent, would bring him into conflict with Russell.

Wheldon’s policy on *Monitor* was to go for ‘big names’. In an attempt to lure Dmitri Shostakovich he mentioned that *Monitor* had featured Britten, Stravinsky, Casals, Menuhin, Bliss, Callas, Beecham and Bernstein.¹⁰ One of his few failures was Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose wife delivered a stinging riposte: ‘[Appearing on *Monitor*] is an idea which he dislikes very much, feeling that an artist’s work must speak for itself and that it cannot be advanced or helped by allowing people to see the artist at work. Nor does he ever speak about his own work; so I’m afraid the answer is an emphatic no.’¹¹ Big names tended to be equated with high art and the celebration of individual genius, while popular culture was often concerned with communal activity. With Elgar, and his other composer biographies, Russell did his share of servicing great men, but he was equally concerned to celebrate the pleasures of ordinary people, for which Wheldon had less enthusiasm.

Wheldon was criticised for talking down to the audience, as when he spelled out the name of the French composer M I L H A U D, but he disliked the word ‘popularisation’ and was determined to make *Monitor* accessible without being condescending. He saw the need to satisfy two different types of viewer. One, represented by his mother-in-law, knew little about the arts but was intelligent and prepared to give *Monitor* a try. At the other extreme was his wife, an intellectual and

very well informed. *Monitor* got hold of a piece of film about Tolstoy, shot towards the end of his life when he renounced the world. Wheldon's wife would not need to be told this, while his mother-in-law would have to be reminded that Tolstoy was a novelist, let alone that he finally turned his back on life. Wheldon's commentary tried to square the circle by referring to Tolstoy's 'famous' renunciation.¹² When D. G. Bridson, a radio producer who was briefly attached to *Monitor* made a film about the poet Ezra Pound, Wheldon's reaction was that nobody knew who Pound was. He told Bridson: 'We need a better selling line - "some say that he is a genius, some say that he is a Fascist, some say that he is mad" - that sort of thing.' Bridson was 'left distinctly sick to my stomach' and apologised to Pound for the 'stupid introduction'.¹³ Russell, too, thought that Wheldon's need to give simple information could be overdone.

Wheldon's biggest quarrel with Russell, however, was over the blurring (as Wheldon saw it) of fact and fiction in documentary. One of Wheldon's favourite aphorisms was that a film-maker had to be true to the subject and the audience. Being true to his subject meant keeping strictly to the known facts about the person's life and not distorting or inventing. Being true to the audience meant being transparent about what was being shown and not, for instance, passing off film specially shot for a programme as coming from an archive. Russell, on the other hand, argued for an imaginative truth that might transcend literal reality. Finally, Russell ran up against Wheldon's Welsh Presbyterian puritanism. He was wary of sexual content in programmes and particularly of what he regarded as sexual deviance. He refused to have a homosexual novelist on *Monitor* or to show clip of a Fellini film featuring a prostitute.¹⁴

Russell's arrival was fortuitous. Schlesinger had been the programme's principal film director but he wanted to move on. Norman Swallow, Assistant Head of Films, had been asked by Wheldon to look at the work of film-makers outside the BBC to find a possible replacement. A friend of Russell's suggested that he send in his films. Swallow was impressed and passed them to Wheldon, who called Russell for an interview. Russell suggested an item illustrating aspects of London as captured in poems by John Betjeman. Wheldon's reaction was that Betjeman was 'a bit lightweight'¹⁵ or in Wheldon's terms, perhaps, not a big enough name. But Russell

was taken on and made the Betjeman film as his first contribution to *Monitor*.

Russell was 31. Born in Southampton, he described his background as working-class, though lower-middle was probably more accurate. His father had been in the Merchant Navy before running a shoe business. At 13 Russell was sent away to the Nautical College at Pangbourne (he later noted that he was the only member of the *Monitor* team who had not been to university) and in 1945 he joined the Merchant Navy. It proved the first of a succession of short-lived careers. Failing to get into the film industry he enlisted in the RAF, where he charged batteries for fighter planes, and then trained to be a ballet dancer. When after four years this got him no further than a touring version of *Annie Get Your Gun* he switched briefly to acting and then photography. He worked as a freelance photojournalist, selling material to magazines, and saved enough money to make the amateur films which became his passport to *Monitor*.

Wheldon later observed that ‘the biggest struggles I had in *Monitor* days were with Ken Russell’.¹⁶ Although Wheldon found Russell ‘very quiet and extremely shy’, Russell was not only full of ideas but subversive from the start. While working on the Betjeman film he dressed friends in Edwardian clothes to evoke the poet’s childhood memories.¹⁷ Wheldon, who was still adamant that actors had no place in documentaries, told him to do the scene again. ‘A row, but no bones broken’, was Wheldon’s recollection.¹⁸ At this stage Russell’s film-making expertise was mainly confined to producing images. He knew nothing about cutting or dubbing. *Monitor*, as he acknowledged later, was his film school. Rows or not, Russell dedicated his autobiography to Wheldon and named one of his sons Huw. Wheldon, for his part, was prepared to nurture and encourage what he saw as an exceptional talent. Like John Grierson in the British documentary film movement of the 1930s, Wheldon’s contribution to *Monitor* lay less in being a creative figure himself than in bringing out the creativity in others.

Nonetheless, Wheldon and Russell came from different directions and disputes were inevitable. Wheldon was in awe of big names, had set down firm principles about integrity to the subject and the audience and was shy about sexual references. But he was prepared to listen to new ideas and once convinced he backed them tenaciously.

Russell was a BBC outsider, untouched by traditional ideas about documentary and with an urge to push out the boundaries. Before Russell arrived *Monitor* had merely recorded the creative process, by showing artists at work near their sources of inspiration. Russell was not content just to record. He wanted to illuminate and interpret, even if this went beyond literal reality.

One of Russell's challenges to established *Monitor* practice, both in content and approach, was in popular culture. He made short films about the guitar craze and brass bands but he took the process much further in *Pop Goes the Easel* (transmitted on 25 March 1962), which, unusually, filled an entire 45-minute *Monitor* programme. The film was notable in several respects. It got away from Wheldon's preference for big, established names by featuring four pop artists, all in their twenties, of whom only Peter Blake was at all known. The others were Pauline Boty, Derek Boshier and Peter Phillips. And while the film followed the *Monitor* mantra of setting artists amid their sources of inspiration, these included Marilyn Monroe, pin tables, cornflakes packets and popular music. Wheldon was uneasy about the project, as the film editor, Allan Tyrer, recalled: 'Huw kept wanting to see the cutting copy. I think he was deeply suspicious of what the result was going to be, whether it would let the whole tone of the department down.'¹⁹

Wheldon's unease was evident in his introduction to the film. Agreeing to Russell's playful request to pan down to him from a picture of Marilyn Monroe, Wheldon, in his sober suit, was an incongruous figure standing in front of a collage of popular icons. His introduction began:

Our programme tonight is a single film we [sic] made about four young artists. They are painters who turn for their inspiration to the world of pop art, the world of the popular imagination, the world of film stars, the twist, science fiction, pop singers - a world you can dismiss, if you feel so inclined, as being tawdry and second rate but a world, all the same in which everybody, to some degree anyway, lives, whether we like it or not.²⁰

Wheldon presented the four as 'serious' artists who had studied at the Royal College of Art and had their work exhibited. But it was hardly a ringing endorsement. Against

that Wheldon had given Russell his head by granting him a full programme and unlike many *Monitor* films, *Pop Goes the Easel* was presented without a Wheldon commentary to justify the content and explain things to the viewer. Wheldon, said Russell, 'was not crazy about pop art but he wasn't a King Canute, either'.²¹

Pop Goes the Easel is a characteristic example of the processes of change in the BBC during the 1960s. It was an idea which came from below (Russell), was accepted with reluctance, presented to the viewer almost apologetically but nevertheless allowed free rein. However, the majority of viewers, if the BBC's sample is representative, endorsed Wheldon's misgivings. The film had a reaction index of only 47, which was the lowest for any *Monitor* programme since the series began in 1958 and compared with an average for the past 12 editions of 65. A large proportion of the sample audience 'deplored this investigation into what they supposed is the beatnik level of the world of art. Certainly many viewers thought it unworthy as a subject for a *Monitor* "probe"'.²² This suggests that the *Monitor* audience, was, like Wheldon, of an age and taste that found pop music and film stars difficult to digest.

The other territory on which Russell challenged *Monitor* practice, and that of the BBC in general, was over the portrayal of real people. In its early years *Monitor* had concentrated on living artists, who could be photographed and interviewed. Dead artists tended to be dealt with by having an expert talk about their work. Russell wanted to do something more imaginative, to evoke the artist (usually a composer) in a biographical format. This set Wheldon's alarm bells ringing, over the blurring of fact and fiction, over truth to the subject and playing fair by the audience. The first of Russell's composer biographies was of Sergei Prokofiev, in a 28-minute film transmitted on 18 June 1961. It was a straightforward chronological account of the composer's life and music. Although still photographs of Prokofiev were available, there was no archive film (or at least none that *Monitor* could get from an uncooperative Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War). Russell's solution was to have the composer played by an actor. This was entirely against Wheldon's instinct and BBC practice. Even in drama the corporation was reluctant to have portrayals of real people. In documentary, which purported to show reality, it was unacceptable.

Wheldon, and his superior, Grace Wyndham Goldie, a stern upholder of 'pure' documentary, did, however, allow Russell two small concessions. He could show an

actor's hands playing the piano, and addressing and stamping an envelope, and he was allowed a reflection of an actor representing Prokofiev in murky pond. Russell regarded this as 'a huge breakthrough'²³, though a long shot of an actor playing Prokofiev on his death bed was rejected. Curiously, perhaps, Wheldon did not object to the use of footage from Eisenstein's film *October* to evoke the 1917 Russian Revolution, although it was a far from accurate portrayal of events. However any departures from strict documentary practice on the screen were counterbalanced by Wheldon's commentary which stuck rigidly to the facts.

The debates about truth in documentary intensified over Russell's next composer biography, *Elgar* (transmitted on 11 November 1962), which ran for 55 minutes, unusually long for *Monitor*, but given special status as the programme's hundredth edition. Russell had broached an Elgar film during his first interview with Wheldon in November 1958, though his idea then was to illustrate the *Enigma Variations*. Wheldon had not seemed keen on the idea, apparently suspicious that Russell was pushing the claims of a fellow Roman Catholic.²⁴ In the previous July, however, Wheldon had replied to Sir Arthur Bliss, who had suggested making a *Monitor* film about Elgar's birthplace, that they would prefer to think of a profile or portrait of the composer.²⁵ The following year Russell wrote to Swallow saying he could not live on *Monitor* films alone and asking for more work. Swallow commissioned treatments for possible films, one of which was on Elgar.²⁶

Much of it bears little relationship to the film made three years later though it outlines the opening sequence of the boy Elgar riding in the Malvern Hills, and it suggests the counterpointing of *Land of Hope and Glory* and footage of the First World War. Crucially, Russell envisaged the use of actors, thus reviving the debates around the Prokofiev film. Swallow was unhappy, writing to Lionel Salter, the Head of Music Programmes, that 'my main reservation ... is the possible disaster that might arise from using actors in the suggested way. My own opinion is that this kind of thing would be much more effective if the people concerned were suggested rather than literally seen. However, I think Russell is a man to be encouraged ...'²⁷ Salter agreed, adding that he was unimpressed with other aspects of Russell's treatment. 'I am convinced that there is not much value in shots of Elgar firing his catapult at cats in the

yard or trying to drive a stubborn mule [neither of which appeared in the eventual film]. After all, the aim of *Monitor*, surely, is to concentrate on art and its relation to the public, not to indulge in gossip column stuff'.²⁸ Swallow repeated his great faith in Russell as an imaginative film-maker and said he intended the Elgar treatment as a film in its own right and not for *Monitor*.²⁹ The project remained on ice for a couple of years but by July 1961 it had been pencilled in for *Monitor* with Russell telling the composer's daughter that 'for some considerable time now I have wanted more than I can say to make a film about Sir Edward's life and music'.³⁰ But because *Monitor*'s camera unit was not free, filming did not start until the following spring.

Meanwhile the problem of representing Elgar had been solved with a compromise. Four actors would play him at different periods of his life but they would be filmed only in medium and long shot. A practical consideration was that as the film used still photographs of Elgar, the actors' faces would not match. More important, at least for Wheldon, was that the actors should not speak. Russell had started writing dialogue scenes but Wheldon 'didn't believe a word of them' and argued that a voice-over had greater authority.³¹ Even so, Wheldon had given considerable ground since agreeing to the actor's hands in the Prokofiev film.

Another point of contention went to the heart of Wheldon's insistence on truth to the artist and the audience. Russell had shot footage of Elgar flying kites with his daughter on the Malvern Hills. Wheldon said it was ludicrous for a grown man such as Elgar to fly kites and told him to cut the sequence. Russell retorted that Elgar did fly kites and rang the Greenwich Observatory beforehand to check the weather forecast. Once Wheldon was convinced that the kite-flying was a fact, he let the footage stay.³² Wheldon's most serious misgivings were over a sequence in which *Land of Hope and Glory* was played over footage from the First World War. It was intended to convey how a marching song written at the time of the Boer War and taken up as a rallying cry in 1914, became increasingly inappropriate as the casualties mounted. So much so that Elgar could no longer bear to hear it. Wheldon, the old soldier, objected that the footage (from the Imperial War Museum) dwelt too much on the suffering of war and not positive qualities such as courage and determination. He also thought the sequence suggested, wrongly, that Elgar was a pacifist. According to Russell, Wheldon wanted to

take the entire section out.³³ It stayed in but was shortened. Again there was compromise, though with Wheldon giving the greater ground.

Russell was credited as writer (effectively scenarist) and director but the narration was written and delivered by Wheldon. Russell thought that the film was 'covered in commentary which stated the obvious'³⁴ though it reflected Wheldon's determination to tell the audience that what they were seeing, while clearly involving dramatic reconstruction, had a factual basis. Viewers, according the BBC's research panel, were almost unanimous in praising the film, which got a reaction index of 86, the highest since *Monitor* began and well above the average of 66 for the previous series. None of the comments mentioned the First World War sequence.³⁵

Russell's next composer biography, on Bela Bartok (transmitted on 24 May 1964), passed off uncontroversially, both within *Monitor* and among the viewing public. To some extent the audience had been prepared, by making it clear that it was a 'film study of the composer and his music, showing reconstructions of events in his life and also imaginary sequences set to his music'.³⁶ An actor played Bartok and was allowed to be seen in close-up, though he did not speak. Apart from the blinking of his eyes, he barely moved, giving the impression almost of a still photograph. Presumably to avoid confusion, there were no photographs or film of Bartok. Archive footage was used and, once again, a clip from *October* as shorthand for the Russian Revolution. But while the Elgar film had been scrupulous about keeping wherever possible to the actual locations, here Russell was allowed considerable imaginative licence. One sequence, designed to underline the composer's feeling of alienation which was a theme of the film, showed him surrounded by dark, anonymous and menacing figures on a moving escalator from which he appears incapable of escaping. The sequence was shot in Leicester Square Underground station. Presumably Wheldon did not challenge Russell to prove that Bartok had travelled on the London Tube. But while Russell was able to play with metaphor, Wheldon's narration anchored the film in a factual account of Bartok's life and music.

The first sequence set to Bartok's music was from a ballet, *The Miraculous Mandarin*, and featured a young prostitute (played by Pauline Boty from *Pop Goes the Easel*) who has been ordered to attract a new client. A young man comes up from the

street below and they prepare to make love. But as she starts unbuttoning her blouse, two thugs (her accomplices) seize the young man and beat and rob him. Wheldon had moved on from the time when he banned a clip from Fellini's *Notti di Cabiria* because it showed a prostitute. According to David Jones, one of the *Monitor* producers, Wheldon had said: 'It's a Sunday. What about families? Someone will have to explain to their families what this woman does.'³⁷ Even without Wheldon's commentary, it was clear what the woman in *The Miraculous Mandarin* was doing. Some of the viewers in the BBC sample found the eroticism in the scene distasteful, though the reaction index of 69 compared with the average of 64 for the current *Monitor* season.³⁸

If the films on Prokofiev, Elgar and Bartok had seen a gradual loosening of Wheldon's restraints on documentary, *The Debussy Film* (transmitted on 18 May 1965) took the process much further. As with Elgar, the idea for a film about Debussy went back several years. In 1961 Humphrey Burton and Russell were preparing a *Monitor* item on Debussy for transmission the following year, the composer's centenary.³⁹ This did not happen but Russell took up the idea with Melvyn Bragg and they wrote a script which they hoped to make as a cinema feature. When this proved impractical they reverted to *Monitor*. Instead of offering, as the previous composer's biographies had done, a fact-based account of Debussy's life and music, they hit upon the device of having a film unit making a film about Debussy. This met the objection to real people being played by actors, since it was clear they were actors from the start. Moreover, they could speak dialogue. The film crew device also allowed Russell to overcome the constraints of television budgets (though, as will emerge, *The Debussy Film* cost far more than the average *Monitor* film) by shooting in virtually one location. Much of the action takes place in and around Eastbourne, to which Debussy fled with his mistress after his wife tried to kill herself and where he finished *La Mer*. But Russell's main motive was artistic. Debussy's 'complex and enigmatic life' called for a less dogmatic approach than he had used on his previous composer biographies, 'something that bound the hallucinatory state of his mind to the dreamlike quality of his music'. Hence the film about a film, with the director and actors recreating fragments of the composer's life and searching for answers.⁴⁰

During the making of the previous composer biographies, Wheldon had been

looking over Russell's shoulder throughout. This time, significantly, Russell seems to have had a freer hand. Wheldon had been promoted to Head of Documentary and Music Programmes, and although *Monitor* was part of his responsibility he was no longer in direct control. Initially he seemed more concerned that Russell was going over budget than causing artistic problems. By September 1964 Russell had shot 70,000 feet, or ten to twelve times what was likely to be used, and Wheldon, who had not seen any of the footage, asked him to keep an eye on 'overshooting and overspending'.⁴¹ Russell appears to have taken little notice for in the following April, a month before transmission, Michael Peacock, the Controller of BBC1, demanded to know why a film originally budgeted at £3,750 (itself twice the usual *Monitor* allocation) had ended up costing more than £10,000.⁴² Richard Cawston, Wheldon's deputy, gave the main reason for the overspend that instead of 45 minutes [*Monitor*'s normal length], the film had run to 82 minutes, thereby trebling the principals' fees under an Equity agreement. The increased length had only been decided 'at the editing stage', which suggests that Russell had not revealed that he intended to make the equivalent of a cinema feature. Cawston added that 'I personally know very little about the film'⁴³ which may be further evidence that during the shooting Russell escaped close scrutiny.

Wheldon did see the finished version and according to Bragg was furious, accusing Bragg and Russell of betraying the basic idea of truth to the artist.⁴⁴ He insisted that the film should open with a series of still photographs of Debussy and a statement that it was based on incidents in the composer's life and used his own words.⁴⁵ He also ordered the removal of a scene set to music from Debussy's ballet, *Jeux*, in which two girls comb each other's hair, put on make-up and kiss. When Russell explained that they were lesbians, Wheldon invoked the mother-in-law test, saying that she would not understand what lesbians were.⁴⁶ Otherwise Wheldon's dislike of *The Debussy Film* seems to have been overcome for with minor cuts it went out much as Russell had wanted, including a striptease by the actress playing Debussy's mistress, Gaby, as a way of ridiculing Debussy and his *Danse Sacré et Danse Profane* which is being played on a gramophone.⁴⁷ Russell also had a dig at Wheldon's insistence on factual accuracy, with a sequence in the woods to *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* in which Debussy and Gaby play with a balloon. Perhaps anticipating

a repeat of the Elgar kite-flying episode, Russell has the director of the film-within-the-film say: 'They played with balloons - I checked!'⁴⁸

Of the composer biographies under discussion, *The Debussy Film* was by far the least conventional. That may explain a reaction index of only 56, compared with 79 for Elgar and 68 for Bartok and the programme containing Prokofiev. While many in the viewing sample thought the film original, exciting and imaginative, they found the film-within-a-film format puzzling and distracting and left them little the wiser about Debussy's life.⁴⁹ As with *Pop Goes the Easel*, Wheldon's instincts may have been more in tune than Russell's with the typical *Monitor* audience.

Peter Watkins, *Culloden* and *The War Game*

As with Russell, Peter Watkins's route to the BBC was through amateur films, his patron was Wheldon and he arrived with ideas about documentary which strongly challenged traditional BBC practice. Once more the impetus for change came 'from below' and it had to be negotiated. But the process of concession by the BBC and compromise by the film-maker, which allowed Russell to continue working for the corporation, broke down and Watkins was cast adrift.

Watkins joined the BBC in April 1963 when he was 27. He was from a suburban middle-class background (his father was a banker) and was sent to a public school, though he was unhappy there and left at 16. Like Russell he had thoughts of becoming an actor and enrolled at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. But, also like Russell, though at an earlier stage, he decided that he wanted to make films. To learn the craft he joined an advertising agency which made television commercials and he later worked as an editor and director of commercial documentaries. Meanwhile a friend had introduced him to amateur movie-making and he devoted most of his spare time and money to this.

From early on his work demonstrated the fascination, bordering on obsession, with the violence of war. *The Web* was about a German soldier captured and killed by the French Resistance. *The Diary of an Unknown Soldier* (1959) evoked the anguish of life and death in the trenches during the First World War. In 1961 he made *Forgotten Faces*, a reconstruction of the 1956 Hungarian uprising. In both its formal strategies, such as location shooting (with Canterbury doubling for Budapest), newsreel-style camerawork, use of non-professional actors and characters speaking

directly to camera, and with its theme of a popular but weakly-led uprising being ruthlessly crushed, it anticipated *Culloden*. It was seen by Tyrer, the film editor on *Monitor*, and he alerted Wheldon who, with BBC2 imminent, was looking to strengthen his documentary department. Like Russell, Watkins had come along at the right time. Wheldon was impressed by *Forgotten Faces* and tracked Watkins down in Paris, where he was trying, unsuccessfully, to break into the French film industry.⁵⁰

In his first interview with Wheldon Watkins suggested a film about the effects of nuclear war. Wheldon immediately pointed out the problem of putting forward a single point of view, particularly on a matter which affected national security.⁵¹ Joining the documentary department as a programme assistant, Watkins was put on a training course, where his project, a film about the torturing of French prisoners in Algeria, gave him an early opportunity to pursue his preoccupation with war and violence. He then worked with Stephen Hearst, an established documentary producer, on a film about Marshal Tito. Although impressed by Watkins's 'brilliance and originality' Hearst said Watkins 'walked with the truth'. He recalled how Watkins had wanted to use shots of executions by the occupying German forces in Czechoslovakia as if they had taken place in Yugoslavia. When Hearst said such liberties must not be taken in a documentary where honesty and accuracy were of utmost importance, Watkins said: 'Well, it's the kind of thing that happened, wasn't it?' Hearst concluded that Watkins's gifts could not be harnessed for the BBC and advised Wheldon to drop him. Wheldon insisted he be kept on.⁵²

Undeterred by Wheldon's reservations, Watkins continued to push for his nuclear film. His first formal proposal was made in August 1963.⁵³ By February 1964 he had produced a detailed estimate of how long it would take to research the film, cast it, choose locations and do the shooting and editing. He also presented a breakdown of cost. He emphasised that the 'nuclear film' was not a single idea in itself, but part of an overall framework of film-style he wanted to work in. A key element was 'using non-professionals, quite ordinary people, to capture the inside heartbeat of other people and events, past and present'. By re-staging events, every second would be under total organised and pre-planned control and yet still give the appearance of actually happening at that moment. He was convinced that this technique could open up 'a

totally new path and direction in documentary television film'.⁵⁴

There followed a list of subjects which Watkins said he would like to tackle apart from the nuclear film. Among them were the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, the prison experiences of the suffragettes and an East German family's escape across the Berlin Wall to the West. But his first, and most detailed, proposal was to reconstruct a real event from much longer ago, the Battle of Culloden (which Watkins, usually a stickler for facts, dates as 1745 instead of 1746). He proposed covering not only the battle itself but the subsequent hunting down of Prince Charles Edward's followers by the Duke of Cumberland's Redcoats. 'The film will be shot entirely out on the rough locations where these events happened'.⁵⁵ Three weeks went by, during which Watkins grew so impatient at the lack of response that he considered resigning. He gave Wheldon an ultimatum: 'I must do what I believe in ... and this means I must make either the nuclear film or the Culloden subject within the next three or four months. If you feel there is still any way of my doing this within the BBC then I would give my right arm for this situation ... But if not, then I feel the termination of my contract ... is the only solution.'⁵⁶

Wheldon's reaction was tell Watkins to put the nuclear film to one side and ask him to pursue the Culloden project, though he was 'bothered' about how Watkins would tackle a massacre.⁵⁷ Watkins set out a shooting schedule and costings for *Culloden* and again made the case for non-professional actors: 'If I want to have an awkward, raw-boned, pox-scarred woman of Nairn talking to camera about what she has experienced under the English occupation troops, then a genuine Highland woman from Nairn, who mentally and physically fits this description, will be far more realistic and have far more jagged truth than could ever anyone from *Spotlight* [the directory of professional actors]'.⁵⁸ By early April, the Culloden film had been given the final go-ahead and Watkins thanked Weldon 'very much for all you've done to get this programme mounted'.⁵⁹ Once again Wheldon had overcome initial doubts to give a project wholehearted backing.

Indeed Wheldon contributed an article to *Radio Times* for the week in which *Culloden* was to be shown, commending the film in unambiguous terms. He characteristically stressed that 'the stubborn facts, fully documented, are sovereign' and

there was virtually no 'dramatic dialogue' (Wheldon's dislike of which had surfaced in his dealings with Russell). 'To claim that new documentary ground is being broken is always dangerous', Wheldon wrote: 'All the same the claim is made.' He said the film brought 'the technique of the newsreel camera to bear on carefully reconstructed events' and that Watkins, using modern documentary methods, had made 'what happened long ago happen with the urgency, the sense of vivid occasion we associate with the brilliant coverage of contemporary events'.⁶⁰

What helped to bring Wheldon on side was precisely Watkins's determination to unearth 'the stubborn facts' and in this context he applauded Watkins's decision to enlist John Prebble as historical adviser. Prebble was the author of a book on the subject which had appeared three years before and become a best-seller.⁶¹ Wheldon knew from careful enquiries that the book was highly regarded in scholarly circles as judicious and authoritative. It would provide the solid backing Watkins needed at this stage in his career.⁶² Watkins, for his part, commended Prebble as not only having 'a tremendous knowledge of the subject but also a necessarily journalistic and impartial approach'.⁶³ Not only did Watkins follow the structure of Prebble's book but he drew on the detail, quoting some of it word for word.⁶⁴

Filming took place during August in Inverness and Glencoe. With his non-professional cast, mostly recruited locally but also including members of a theatre group who had appeared in *Forgotten Faces*, and real locations, Watkins acknowledged the influence of Italian neo-realist cinema. But his main inspiration was television itself. He promised that 'every single foot of the film, be it violent action or someone uttering forth to camera, is going to be filmed with bumpy journalistic grain and realism, exactly as though it is happening there and then, and is being recorded by a sort of *World In Action* team'.⁶⁵ *World In Action*, which had started the previous year, was a current affairs programme from Granada Television which presented investigative reports in a punchy style. The commentary to *Culloden*, written and spoken by Watkins himself and set in the present tense, replicates *World In Action*'s urgent, staccato delivery, the journalistic attention to facts and pithy assessments of individuals.

A key feature of the film is that the characters speak straight to camera. Sometimes they are responding to questions from an off-screen interviewer, another

device taken from television. By presenting voices from both sides of the conflict, Watkins challenges his own omniscient narrator and allows viewers to judge between different versions. A third narrative element (to some critics unnecessarily confusing) is a commentary on the battle by the seventeenth-century historian, Andrew Henderson, who was there and later wrote a biography of Cumberland. Throughout the film the camera, a 16 mm Arriflex usually hand held, stays close to the characters and the action. This is partly for dramatic emphasis and is particularly effective in showing the hand-to-hand fighting, bloodied faces shrieking with pain and the dead and dying. But it also stemmed from practical necessity. A battle involving 9,000 soldiers on one side and some 5,000 on the other was reconstructed by Watkins with a cast of only 140. To have pulled the camera back to reveal a dozen men representing one thousand or more would have destroyed the illusion.

Culloden was shown on BBC1 on 15 December 1964 with a long running time for a documentary of 70 minutes. The almost universal critical praise was significant for its concentration on the formal strategies. Mary Crozier described the film as ‘brutal, biting and unforgettable’.⁶⁶ Philip Purser observed that while applying contemporary current affairs methods to historical events was not new, ‘never before has the convention been carried to such a confident conclusion. It seems to me to be the quintessence of television’.⁶⁷ BBC audience research revealed a similar emphasis.⁶⁸ Viewers commented on ‘an immediacy of feeling it would be vain to look for in any history text’. Details of the battle and its sequence were ‘as vivid and as grievous in implication as any on-the-spot reporting of contemporary warfare’. This was ‘history in the flesh’. There was praise for the realism of the reconstruction, with the ‘astonishingly natural’ non-professional cast.

For a number of viewers the film had a ‘tremendous anti-war impact’. One woman said the utter cruelty of the government troops reminded her of recent events in the Congo (where a bloody civil war had followed the granting of independence by Belgium). Adrian Mitchell, too, wrote of the ‘Congo-like brutality’.⁶⁹ It was a connection that Watkins, who intended that *Culloden* should have a wider resonance than recalling a 200-year-old battle, would have appreciated. The anti-war theme was picked up by Purser, who recalled Watkins had originally wanted to make a film about nuclear war. ‘Deflected by his department, he opted for historical reconstruction instead

and predictably ended up with a more vehement anti-violence document than would ever have been possible on the nuclear front.’⁷⁰ For a minority of viewers in the BBC sample there was too much blood and horror, and the *Times* reviewer questioned whether the extreme brutality made the film suitable for children (it was transmitted at 8.05pm, nearly an hour before the ‘watershed’).⁷¹

Although the Battle of Culloden and its aftermath is an emotive episode in Scottish, and English, history, Watkins’s film drew few complaints about its interpretation of events. He was concerned to emphasise the tragedy of Culloden and to deflate the myth of Bonnie Prince Charlie: ‘My hope is that *Culloden* will jolt people into a blunt awareness of an immensely sad and brutal period of history, plus, in the process, tearing down the curtain of nonsense around Prince Charles that has helped to obscure this period.’⁷² Although a Scottish critic, Robert Kemp, complained that ‘Prince Charles was accorded no last vestige of charm’, without which the Rising ‘becomes unbelievable’, he did not demur from Watkins’s portrayal of the battle as a ‘disastrous bungle’ by the Jacobites and an occasion for barbarity by the government ‘which makes the Congolese rebels [yet another contemporary reference] seem almost mild by comparison’.⁷³ Watkins’s version of history was less radical than its formal strategies.

The BBC was sufficiently encouraged by the reception for *Culloden* to repeat it only six weeks later and it gave Watkins the leverage to pursue his nuclear war project. As soon as shooting on *Culloden* was finished he wrote to Wheldon asking permission to start work on the nuclear film, then entitled *After the Bomb*. At the beginning of November 1964 Wheldon authorised Watkins to go to Berlin to obtain material. After *Culloden*’s showing, and favourable reception, Wheldon wrote to Kenneth Adam, the Director of Television, explaining his decision to give *The War Game* the go-ahead but setting out his reservations. He said that ‘other factors apart, I am anxious to keep Watkins; and to do so I must certainly let him get this film out of his system’. He mentioned having several discussions with Goldie (his immediate superior as Head of Talks and Current Affairs), who thought the film should be made ‘on the grounds that, so long as there is no security risk and the facts are authentic, the people should be trusted with the truth’. There was the view ‘at experienced levels’ that since nothing

could be done to save Britain from annihilation, it was better not to give frightening facts. Goldie did not agree, though she noted that the film was 'bound to be horrifying and unpopular - but surely necessary'. Wheldon recommended that the film go forward but 'with the greatest anxiety'. He added: 'Clearly the film cannot be put out until it has been seen, and we must decide later precisely who should see it.'⁷⁴

Early in 1965 Watkins, who had started gathering material, went to see Peter Thorneycroft, the Shadow Minister of Defence. Thorneycroft thereupon wrote to Hugh Greene, saying that while he was impressed by Watkins's enthusiasm and ability, he was concerned that the film would challenge the policy of the nuclear deterrent and suggested that Greene should give the matter his close personal attention.⁷⁵ Watkins also approached the Home Office, putting more than 40 questions on the effects of nuclear war and the preparations being made to meet them. The Home Office said it found the majority difficult to answer on security grounds. Like Thorneycroft, the Home Office was concerned about the film and expressed its anxieties to its BBC contact, H. D. Winther, who passed them on to his superior, John Arkell, the Director of Administration. While the Home Office did not wish to compromise the BBC's independence, it hoped that any programme which, in the government's view, could be against the national interest, or prejudicial to security, should be prepared with the utmost care and responsibility and controlled at the highest level within the corporation.⁷⁶

Wheldon hoped the Home Office would not answer Watkins's questions for 'it would be better for both of us if we handle it [the film] independently'.⁷⁷ Arkell, however, suggested to Greene that it would be possible to enlist the Home Office's help 'without compromising our independence' and thought getting advice as the programme was being made was preferable to letting an official see a finished version. 'The final advice might be rather too late - and theoretically might even result in the government's first exercise of its power of veto of a particular programme'. Arkell also noted that Lord Normanbrook, the BBC Chairman, had once been the chairman of the Home Office Defence Committee and was, therefore, 'well-placed to help us in this matter'.⁷⁸

At some stage (the Phelps dossier, see note 50, says early January, but other

documentation suggests it was later) Wheldon had a long discussion about *The War Game* with Greene. His initial reaction was that the film would be too horrifying to be shown on television and might, unwittingly, touch on classified information. Wheldon was worried that the BBC would lose one of its most original and promising young talents. Despite the misgivings, which they all shared, he urged Greene to let Watkins go ahead. Greene finally agreed to a stage by stage process, giving his approval in the first instance only to researching and scripting.⁷⁹ Watkins finished his first script by the end of February. Wheldon took it to Greene and Normanbrook, who was brought into the discussions for, it seems, the first time. Both men thought there were so many difficulties that on balance the film was not worth attempting. But Wheldon again successfully fought Watkins's corner and Greene and Normanbrook agreed that shooting could go ahead, though this did not guarantee that the film would be transmitted. The qualified nature of Greene's approval was made clear to Watkins.⁸⁰

During April Watkins completed most of the filming, in locations in Dover, Gravesend and Tonbridge. On 17 June he showed a rough cut to a panel of expert consultants he had recruited in December, to check facts and invite their comments. There were several criticisms, some of them substantial, and Watkins made revisions. As a further check on authenticity Gilbert Phelps went through the script to ensure that all the facts and statements in it came from expert sources. Wheldon, who was by now Controller of Programmes, and Richard Cawston, head of a new documentary department, saw an early version of the film on 24 June. Both were 'profoundly disappointed'. Wheldon had particular doubts about a sequence of the police carrying out mercy killings and a scene where looters are executed by a police firing squad. Cawston thought the tone of the film 'smacked too much of a CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament] handout'.

Although upset by these reactions, Watkins agreed to changes, which included cutting the film by 20 minutes. But he refused to drop the mercy killings or the public executions, on which Wheldon subsequently softened. Watkins did, however, agree to a balancing caption at the start of the film setting out the case for the nuclear deterrent.⁸¹ Cawston suggested to Adam (who saw the amended version on 18 August) that the film should be preceded by a statement, stressing that it was not propaganda and was based on painstaking research but conceding that it was bound to contain an element of

conjecture and guesswork and was being presented as a work by fiction by one man.⁸² The film went forward to Greene and was tentatively scheduled for the week starting 18 October.

Greene and Normanbrook saw the film on 2 September. They agreed it was an impressive documentary but both had serious reservations. Normanbrook was worried that it might be disturbing to old people and children, while Greene feared that it might become a platform for left-wing elements in the Labour Party at a time when the government had a majority of only two and a general election might be imminent. Greene and Normanbrook agreed that the responsibility for its public showing was too great for the BBC to bear alone. The Chairman therefore proposed to take soundings in Whitehall, from senior civil servants, probably including officials from the Ministry of Defence.⁸³ From this decision stems the accusation that *The War Game* was suppressed for political reasons through collusion between the BBC and the government.⁸⁴ Normanbrook, on this analysis, was hardly an independent voice. Not only had he been at the heart of government but, as Arkell had recalled, been directly involved in defence policy as chairman of the Home Office Defence Committee. Moreover, the BBC had co-operated closely with Civil Defence in the 1950s.⁸⁵ However, in his letter to Sir Burke Trend, his successor as Cabinet Secretary, Normanbrook put the case for *The War Game* in robust terms. He said the film was not designed as propaganda, that it was based on careful research into official material and been produced with considerable restraint. But he conceded that the subject was, necessarily, alarming and the BBC felt the government should be able to express a view on whether, or when, the film should be shown. To this end he suggested that senior officials from the relevant Whitehall departments should see it.⁸⁶

Before this showing took place Watkins had left the BBC. He was dismayed by Normanbrook's decision to consult with Whitehall which he considered a negation of the BBC's independence.⁸⁷ He told Cawston that unless the BBC decided whether to transmit *The War Game* without going through the government process, he would resign.⁸⁸ He carried out this threat five days later. For Watkins *The War Game* had become a matter of faith. He was convinced that the policy of the nuclear deterrent was not only wrong, but dangerous, and that the true effects of a nuclear attack had been

concealed from the British people. That was the argument of the film. Watkins knew from the start that it might not be screened. He does not, however, seem to have appreciated the extent to which a programme presenting a direct challenge to British defence policy would create problems for the BBC. Whether, however, he was the victim of a conspiracy can only be judged from the available evidence.

A private showing took place at the BBC Television Centre on 24 September, attended by Trend, Sir Charles Cunningham, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office, and officials representing the Ministry of Defence, the Chiefs of Staff and the Post Office. Normanbrook, Sir Robert Lusty, a governor, Oliver Whitley, Chief Assistant to the Director-General, and Arkell, Director of Administration, represented the BBC. Greene was at a Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference in Nigeria from where he went on to visit Liberia and Sierra Leone. In his absence Normanbrook assumed the main responsibility for deciding the fate of *The War Game* and Greene seems to have played a secondary role from then on.

After the showing Normanbrook put the case 'as forcibly as I could' that in a democracy the people ought to have a clearer imaginative picture of the realities of nuclear warfare, though he was not arguing that the film should be shown. The officials thought there were some inaccuracies and that in its concluding stages the film was tendentious in suggesting that the proliferation of nuclear weapons was increasing the risk of a nuclear war. Most of the officials felt that whatever its intention, the film would have the effect of lending support to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.⁸⁹

Throughout the controversy surrounding *The War Game*, CND loomed large. It had been founded in 1958 and initially attracted large numbers, with 150,000 people (on one estimate) attending a rally in Hyde Park, London, in 1962. Some of CND's supporters were pacifists opposed to war on principle. But a fundamental argument of non-pacifist CND leaders was that nuclear weapons, both in their scale of destruction and the after-effects of radiation, presented an entirely new threat, one that could obliterate life over large areas. It was therefore imperative to halt the nuclear arms race. CND argued that by being a nuclear power the United Kingdom made itself vulnerable to attack and that it would be safer if it renounced nuclear weapons. A unilateral gesture from Britain might persuade the United States and the Soviet Union to reconsider their nuclear policies and cause countries aspiring to be nuclear powers to think again.

The War Game did not advocate unilateral nuclear disarmament, though it did endorse the CND arguments about Britain's vulnerability as a nuclear power and the uniquely destructive force of a nuclear attack. After the BBC decided not to show the film, CND groups campaigned for it to be shown in cinemas and other public places. Although *The War Game* to an extent endorsed the CND position, Watkins cancelled an invitation to address a CND rally at University College, Cardiff, explaining: 'I am very wary about what I say and do. I have been accused of "being CND" and to go and address a large meeting of CND members at this point could be a mistake.'⁹⁰

CND represented the main focus of opposition to British defence policy based on the nuclear deterrent. The decision that Britain should build its own atomic bomb was taken by the Attlee government, in secret, in 1947. During the 1950s the NATO strategy of relying on Western nuclear superiority to deter a Soviet attack was endorsed by Conservative governments. To the dismay of CND activists, including some Labour MPs, it was continued by the Labour government which took office in October 1964. Moreover that government had been elected with an overall majority of five (later reduced by by-election defeats) and could have been brought down by the estimated 40 or so back benchers who supported CND. As Greene had argued, the BBC could not be seen to be influencing the fate of a government, with which (as Chapter V will show) its relations were becoming increasingly strained. Too much weight may have been put on this. After the initial surge, support for CND had fallen away. According to one account, 'between 1963 and 1979 the campaign was virtually moribund, numbering only a few thousand supporters'.⁹¹ All the same, the repeated references to CND in the documents show how seriously it was being taken, within the BBC and in Whitehall.

After seeing *The War Game* Trend sent a report to Herbert Bowden, Lord President of the Council, who had been deputed to handle the matter on behalf of the government. Trend's advice was that because the implications of showing the film were 'so highly political' ministers should see it for themselves. He set out the factors they would need to have in mind. He found the film 'unbalanced' in three respects. The opening sequence showed the Western Powers and the Soviet Union slipping into a nuclear war 'in a way that could only be described as highly ill-considered and irresponsible' and ignored the political effort that would be made to prevent a nuclear holocaust. Secondly, the film ignored the political argument that the possession of

nuclear bombs by two parties was in itself a safeguard against their use. Thirdly, by limiting the portrayal of the effects of a nuclear attack to a region in Kent, while allowing the film to show how hopelessly inadequate the Civil Defence preparations and resources would be to cope with the situation, not only contained several inaccuracies and improbabilities but said nothing about the effectiveness of these preparations and resources outside target areas. Trend went on to ask whether the film was consistent with the BBC undertaking to 'treat controversial subjects with due balance and impartiality' and added that if the BBC were to show the film it would have to be at a late hour and with a warning about its unsuitability about its general viewing.

Trend did not recommend that the film should not be shown. On the contrary he set out several cogent arguments in its favour. The BBC had a duty to educate the public as well as entertain them and it 'should not be put off from showing a film simply out of regard for the shock which the ignorant may suffer from having the facts brought home to them'. Moreover 'if the government appeared to be overriding this duty too lightly, they might well be thought to be trying to use their authority over the BBC in order to sweep under the rug an issue which they found politically embarrassing'. Trend added that while the film was out of balance in important respects, 'it cannot seriously be argued that the portrayal of the effects of a nuclear attack on a particular target area is generally misleading, inaccurate or likely to convey an exaggerated impression of the miseries which would befall. Indeed, the effects at any given place might be a good deal worse than anything in the film'. Even the sequence of the police shooting civilians could be justified. Finally, if it was decided the film should not be shown 'the difficulty for the BBC, no less than for the government, is to think of some reason for suppressing [it] that would not stir up controversy or provoke suspicion that it was motivated by political prejudice'.⁹²

Trend discussed his report with Bowden who suggested a copy should go to the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, so that the three of them could discuss it. Their meeting took place on 12 October and it was agreed that Trend should indicate to Normanbrook 'that Her Majesty's government, as a government, did not wish to offer any view on whether or not the film should be shown to the public'. Trend might, however, offer to arrange for Normanbrook to hear privately the views of Whitehall officials. Trend might also suggest to the BBC ways of presenting the film 'which

would put its controversial aspects in perspective', perhaps following its showing with a discussion during which balanced comment could be given.⁹³ This would seem to demolish any conspiracy theory. Not only did the government have no view but it was accepting that the film might be shown, hence its suggestion of a 'balancing discussion'. Members of the government, from Wilson downwards, subsequently insisted publicly that there had been no interference and that the decision not to show the film had been entirely the BBC's.

The only senior minister who is on record as being against the showing of the film is Sir Frank Soskice, the Home Secretary. But he realised that the critical question was whether it was right for the government to discourage the BBC and he felt that the decision must be left to the corporation. The government would put itself in a very difficult position if it could be said that it had either forbidden the showing of the film or used its influence to discourage it.⁹⁴ Soskice agreed with Trend that a small group of ministers should see the film. That this was not done may further undermine the conspiracy theory, for the government would have been reluctant to order the BBC to suppress a programme without first seeing it.

Opinion at the BBC, meanwhile, was divided. Robert Lusty endorsed Normanbrook's feeling that the BBC should not broadcast *The War Game* on its own responsibility and said he thought the BBC should not show it 'unless pressed to do so (which seems unlikely)'.⁹⁵ However, Whitley (effectively Greene's deputy) said he 'was disinclined to accept that the film could not be broadcast'. He suggested that it could be acceptable with an introduction which tried to put distance between Watkins and the BBC by saying that while the film was not perfect or always fair, it was one man's deeply-held conception.⁹⁶ Normanbrook saw Trend, Cunningham and an official from the Post Office on 5 October, when Trend repeated that ministers did not wish to see the film or express any opinion on whether it should be shown. Normanbrook said it was clear that Whitehall wished to leave the decision to the BBC but added: 'It is also clear that Whitehall will be relieved if the BBC decides not to show it'.⁹⁷ According to Trend's account of the meeting, 'Normanbrook's personal view was that [the] film should not be shown, but he would take further soundings within the BBC'.⁹⁸ On 22 November the BBC Board of Management heard from

Greene that a decision not to show the film was imminent. George Campey, the Head of Publicity, said that unless special precautions were taken, it was likely that the press would assume that the BBC had yielded to pressure from the Home Office. Greene brushed this aside and said he was not prepared to meet the press on the issue.⁹⁹ On 24 November Normanbrook informed Trend of the BBC's decision not to broadcast *The War Game* and it was made public two days later.

Normanbrook's view that Whitehall 'will be relieved' if the BBC decided not to show the film was later cited by Watkins as evidence of Establishment collusion.¹⁰⁰ But there is a distinction between the permanent officials and the government. A government can order the BBC not to transmit a programme, Whitehall can only give advice. The written records give no clue as to how the decision not to show *The War Game* was arrived at. It seems to have been taken by Normanbrook, with Greene's consent. Minutes of the BBC Board of Management reveal no discussion of the matter, only approval of the decision once it had been made. The BBC's statement of 26 November said it had been taken without 'outside pressure of any kind'.¹⁰¹ Normanbrook may have been influenced by the opinions of the Whitehall officials, which, after all, he had sought. But influence is not the same as pressure and a government view, which he broached with Trend on 7 September, had not been forthcoming. Equally, it is difficult to believe that the decision not to show the film was based purely, as the 26 November statement suggested, on it being 'judged too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting'.

For the BBC *The War Game* raised three sets of problems which went to the heart of its policy and remit. The first was the mixing of fact and fiction in a documentary programme. Watkins's meticulous research, and willingness to accept expert correction, overcame this to a point but in a film about something that had not happened there had to be a high degree of speculation. The second was the BBC's obligation to be impartial and maintain balance. *The War Game* was an unambiguous attack on the policy of the nuclear deterrent, hence the suggestions for a balancing prologue and for distancing the BBC from Watkins's 'personal' view. Finally, because the film touched on sensitive security matters the BBC had to take account of Whitehall's misgivings while not being seen to compromise its independence from government. For all these reasons the BBC decided to play safe, perhaps hoping that

the humanitarian argument for not showing the film would prevail over the others. Watkins, for one, made sure this did not happen.

Conclusion

Russell and Watkins exemplify in the field of documentary the processes by which change within the BBC during the 1960s was initiated, negotiated and sometimes aborted. It was change which started 'from below'. Russell and Watkins both joined the BBC as young men with no experience of television but a determination to challenge television's conventions. The change which they sought to bring about had to be fought for, in each case with Wheldon acting as the keeper of BBC tradition. It was a process of concession, sometimes reluctant on Wheldon's part, and compromise. With Russell, and with Watkins over *Culloden*, the process was contained within the BBC and sufficiently resolved to allow the work to be transmitted. With *The War Game*, resolution proved impossible. Political considerations probably influenced the decision not to show the film more than a concern for its effect on vulnerable people, though the available archival evidence does not support the allegation by Watkins and his supporters of a conspiracy between the BBC and the government.

Notes

1. BBC WAC T32/937/1: Kenneth Adam to Leonard Miall, 19 March 1957.
2. Ibid: Miall to Adam, 1 April 1957.
3. Ibid: Joanna Spicer, Head of Programme Planning, Television, to Grace Wyndham Goldie, Assistant Head of Talks, 25 June 1957.
4. Ibid: Catherine Dove to Goldie, 13 November 1957.
5. Ibid: Goldie to Miall, 2 December 1957.
6. Ibid: Goldie to Adam, 7 January 1958.
7. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Oral History Transcript, Sir Huw Wheldon interviewed by Frank Gillard, 1978.
8. Ibid.
9. BBC WAC T32/937/2: Wheldon to John Read, 9 July 1959.
10. BBC WAC T32/933/1: Wheldon to Shostakovich, 27 July 1960.

11. BBC WAC T32/937/1: Ursula Vaughan Williams to Wheldon, 14 February 1958.
12. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
13. D. G. Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel: The Rise and Fall of Radio* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), pp 250-51.
14. Paul Ferris, *Sir Huge: The Life of Huw Wheldon* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990), pp 144, 153.
15. Ken Russell, *A British Picture: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1989), p 20.
16. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
17. Russell, op cit, p 22.
18. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
19. *Omnibus*, BBC1, 11 April 1986. The programme was a tribute to Wheldon, who had died on 14 March.
20. From a viewing copy of *Pop Goes the Easel*, held by the National Film and Television Archive.
21. Quoted in Ferris, op cit, p 152.
22. BBC WAC T32/102/1: *Pop Goes the Easel*, Audience Research Report, 24 April 1962.
23. *Omnibus*, 11 April 1986, op cit.
24. Russell, op cit, pp 14-15, 20.
25. BBC WAC T32/1033/2: Wheldon to Arthur Bliss, 9 July 1958.
26. BBC WAC T32/1033/1. It is undated but was probably completed during May 1959.
27. BBC WAC T32/1033/2: Norman Swallow to Lionel Salter, 1 June 1959.
28. Ibid: Salter to Swallow, 2 June 1959.
29. Ibid: Swallow to Salter, 4 June 1959.
30. Ibid: Russell to Mrs Carice Elgar Blake, 28 July 1961.
31. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Wheldon Oral History Transcript, op cit.
32. *Omnibus*, 11 April 1986, op cit.
33. Ferris, op cit, p 160.
34. Russell, op cit, p 27.
35. BBC WAC T32/1033/1: *Elgar*, Audience Research Report, 3 December 1962.

36. BBC WAC T32/1072/1: promotional material, undated.
37. Quoted in Ferris, op cit, p 153-54.
38. BBC WAC T32/1072/1: *Bartok*, Audience Research Report, 25 June 1964.
39. BBC WAC T32/1095/1: Humphrey Burton to Mrs Margaret McLaren, 31 July 1961.
40. *Radio Times*, 13 May 1965, p 31.
41. BBC WAC T32/1095/2: Wheldon to Russell, 16 September 1964.
42. Ibid: Michael Peacock to Richard Cawston, 22 April 1965.
44. Ferris, op cit, pp 161-62.
45. John Baxter, *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), p 123.
46. Ibid: pp 116-17.
47. Ibid: p 129.
48. Ibid: p 116.
49. BBC WAC T32/1095/2: *The Debussy Film*, Audience Research Report, 4 June 1965.
50. BBC WAC S251 Box 8: 'The Story of *The War Game*', p 2. This is a dossier compiled, at the BBC's request, by a former employee, Gilbert Phelps. He sat in on meetings and was given access to documents, though his account sometimes differs from the documentary evidence.
51. Ibid: pp 2-3.
52. Ibid: pp 5-6.
53. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Watkins to Wheldon (through Stephen Hearst), 7 August 1963.
54. BBC WAC T32/515/3: Watkins to Wheldon, 24 February 1964.
55. Ibid.
56. BBC WAC S251 Box 8: Watkins to Wheldon, 16 March 1964.
57. BBC WAC R143/133/2: Wheldon Oral History transcript, op cit.
58. BBC WAC T32/515/3: Watkins to Wheldon, 17 March 1964.
59. Ibid: 6 April 1964.
60. *Radio Times*, 10 December 1964, p 27.
61. John Prebble, *Culloden* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961).

62. BBC WAC S251 Box 8: p 12.
63. BBC WAC T32/515/3: Watkins to Wheldon, 4 May 1964.
64. Nicholas J. Cull, 'Peter Watkins's *Culloden* and the Alternative Form in Historical Filmmaking', *Film International* (Sweden), no 1 (2003), pp 48-53.
65. BBC WAC T12/515/2: Watkins to John Prebble, 10 July 1964.
66. *The Guardian*, 16 December 1964.
67. *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 December 1964.
68. BBC WAC T32/515/3: Audience Research Report, *Culloden*, 8 January 1965.
69. *The Sun*, 16 December 1964.
70. *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 December 1964.
71. *The Times*, 16 December 1964.
72. BBC WAC T12/515/1: Watkins to Hugh Macphie, 30 October 1964.
73. *Glasgow Herald*, 16 December 1964.
74. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Wheldon to Adam, 31 December 1964.
75. Ibid: Peter Thorneycroft to Hugh Greene, 18 January 1965.
76. Ibid: H. D. Winther to John Arkell, 22 January 1965.
77. Ibid: Wheldon to Winther, 15 February 1965.
78. BBC WAC R78/2620/1: Arkell to Greene, 18 February 1965.
79. BBC WAC S251 Box 8: p 22.
80. Ibid: p 25.
81. Ibid: pp 41-44.
82. BBC WAC T56/265/1: Cawston to Adam, 25 August 1965.
83. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Adam to Television Controllers' Meeting, 6 September 1965.
84. Patrick Murphy sets out the conspiracy theory in '*The War Game* - the Controversy', *Film International*, no 3 (2003), pp 25-28.
85. Asa Briggs, *Competition: The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* vol V (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p 532.
86. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Normanbrook to Trend, 7 September 1965.
87. BBC WAC S251 Box 8: Watkins to Cawston, 10 September 1965.
88. Ibid: Watkins to Cawston, 14 September 1965.

89. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Normanbrook's record of the meeting, 27 September 1965.
90. *South Wales Echo and Evening Express*, 15 February 1966.
91. Paul Byrne, *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p 1.
92. TNA: PRO: PREM 13/139, Trend to Herbert Bowden, 6 October 1965.
93. TNA: PRO: PREM 13/139: D. J. Mitchell (Prime Minister's Principal Private Secretary) to Trend, 12 October 1965.
94. TNA: PRO: CAB 21/5808: Sir Charles Cunningham to Trend, 13 October 1965.
95. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Robert Lusty to Normanbrook, 28 September 1965.
96. Ibid: Oliver Whitley to Normanbrook, 4 October 1965.
97. Ibid: Normanbrook to Greene, 5 November 1965.
98. TNA: PRO: CAB 21/5808: Minutes of a meeting at the Cabinet Office, 5 November 1965.
99. BBC WAC R78/2620/1: Board of Management minutes, 22 November 1965.
100. Peter Watkins, 'Dying to Know', *The Guardian*, 6 December 1980.
101. BBC WAC T16/679/1: Press Announcement, 26 November 1965.

2. PLAYS OF TODAY: *Z CARS* AND *THE WEDNESDAY PLAY*

Introduction

The main areas of innovation in BBC drama during the 1960s were *Z Cars* and *The Wednesday Play*. Although representing different dramatic forms - one was a police series, the other an umbrella title for seasons of single plays - they had a number of common elements. First, they were contemporary dramas, often tapping into the issues and concerns of a changing British society in which the established values were being challenged. Secondly, they offered an outlet for, and actively encouraged, new young producers, directors and writers. Thirdly, in striving for authenticity of treatment both sparked debates about realism and naturalism. Finally, both provoked strong reactions, despite attracting large audiences and having the critics mainly on their side. But whereas *Z Cars* was supported by the BBC throughout, *The Wednesday Play* often found the corporation torn between wanting to be seen to be encouraging artistic initiative and defending itself against accusations of departing from its traditional values of taste, balance and objectivity.

Z Cars: 'a kind of documentary about people's lives'

After the first episode of *Z Cars* was screened on 2 January 1962, one critic wrote: '*Z Cars* promises to be one of the most authentic series of police at work. Up to now they have usually been extras in comedy programmes or father-figures patrolling Dock Green. The script [by Troy Kennedy Martin] penetrates beyond the usual cardboard figures of such series and brings to the screen men of warm humour, lively character and the normal share of human weakness.'¹ The same points, about showing policemen as they really were, and comparing *Z Cars* favourably in this respect with *Dixon of Dock Green* (which had been running since 1955) were made by other critics.² Any analysis of *Z Cars* must begin with this claim to authenticity. This section will examine how the series represented the police, in relation to both the criminal fraternity and wider society. It will look at the significance of the northern setting, which was seen as helping to establish the realism of the series, and how the BBC was able to fend off police and other criticism. The discussion will concentrate on the first five seasons of *Z Cars* which ran from January 1962 to December 1965. Although the

series returned after a gap, and continued until 1978, it took on a different format and did not have the same creative energy.

Z Cars emerged from a tradition of documentary drama which had been established in the BBC during the 1950s, an important element of which was programmes about the police. A leading figure was Robert Barr, a writer and producer whose credits included *Pilgrim Street* (1952) and *Scotland Yard* (1960), both made in co-operation with the Metropolitan Police and drawing on real cases. Barr later worked on *Z Cars* as story editor and writer. But the direct precursor of *Z Cars* was the 'story documentary' developed by the writer Colin Morris and producer Gilchrist Calder. Like the Barr series the Morris/Calder programmes drew their material from the police but were set in the North and the main police contact was a retired detective sergeant from Liverpool, Bill Prendergast. Morris first met Prendergast in 1956 when he was working on *Tearaway*, about the intimidation of witnesses in a crime-ridden area of Liverpool. They collaborated again on *Who, Me?* (1959), which featured a detective modelled on Prendergast and dealt with methods of police interrogation in breaking down suspects.³

Who, Me? led directly to *Z Cars* and the link was Elwyn Jones. From a working class family in Wales, Jones had been to the London School of Economics and gone into journalism. He joined the BBC in 1950, working on *Radio Times* before moving to the drama department. By 1959 he was Drama Documentary Supervisor and through *Who, Me?* had made contact with the Lancashire County Police who had used the programme on training courses. This gave him the idea of a police series set in the North. In November 1960 he paid his first exploratory visit to Lancashire and by the following March the project had crystallised. After discussion with Bill Roberts, head of the CID, he wrote to William Palfrey, the Assistant Chief Constable: 'I very much want to mount a series of programmes about the police in a non-Metropolitan setting and it seemed to me that your crime car operation ... would be an ideal basis. Our aim would be to make [the programmes] as authentic as possible and for this we should need you active co-operation.' Jones had suggested to Roberts that 'one of our young writers' might visit the police headquarters to get background and spend time in one of the divisions with a view to producing a programme format.⁴

The 'young writer' was 29-year-old Troy Kennedy Martin. From a Glaswegian

Irish background, he read history at Trinity College, Dublin, and broke into television in 1958 with *Incident at Echo Six*, a play which drew on his National Service experience in Cyprus. On the strength of it he joined the BBC script editors' department, where his contemporaries were two other key figures in the development of *Z Cars*, John McGrath and John Hopkins. Kennedy Martin claimed to have hit upon a series based on crime patrol cars while recovering from mumps and listening to police reports on VHF radio, though this seems to contradict the BBC version that the idea originated with Jones.⁵ What is not in dispute is that Kennedy Martin went to Lancashire in April 1961 and devised the *Z Cars* format, for which he held the copyright and was paid a format fee on every episode.⁶

As Jones had suggested, Kennedy Martin visited the Lancashire Constabulary at its Preston headquarters and spent time in one of its 18 divisions. This was Q Division which, crucially for *Z Cars*, included Kirkby. Kennedy Martin described it unflatteringly as 'one of the black spots of England, an overspill New Town from the slums of Liverpool, where 50,000 displaced and truculent Merseysiders carry out a continuous war against authority and where crime and adolescent terror incubate in a kind of atmosphere of immorality one associates with Dickensian England'.⁷ Kirkby was the basis for the fictional Newtown, while the coastal area of Seaforth and Caradoc, also in Q Division, became Seaport.

Kennedy Martin observed that 'what hits a southerner like a blow in the solar plexus, both in the county in general and in Q Division in particular, is the rough, tough, vital atmosphere. Life is raw, ugly, salty and fast. This is the land of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* with a vengeance, the home of Billy Liar, Jimmy Porter, Lucky Jim, the birthplace of ugly dramas like *The Angry Silence* and *Room At the Top*'.⁸ Kennedy Martin was using 'land' in a cultural, rather than a topographical, sense, for none of the films, novels or plays he alludes to was set in Lancashire. It is, however, significant that he was aligning *Z Cars* with critiques of British society both by writers who had become labelled as 'Angry Young Men' and by the New Wave cinema. He also hoped that *Z Cars* could make use of 'young, vital actors of the new school of [Albert] Finney and [Peter] O'Toole'.⁹ Historians have placed television realism, of which *Z Cars* was an important example, in the wider context of developments in the

theatre, the novel and the cinema ¹⁰ and the theatre director, Sir Peter Hall said that without *Look Back In Anger* there would have been no *Z Cars*.¹¹ But the specific origins of *Z Cars* lie in television drama-documentary.

From his observation of Q Division Kennedy Martin saw the police as ‘tough, quick-witted, humorous. And they are not afraid to be not nice. They don’t want to be loved and they don’t want to be feared, either. But they do want to be respected. They can be warm, generous but never, never nice’. The series should reflect this, by being ‘hard, tough and realistic with an abundance of northern humour’. He added that ‘this should hit ITV where it hurts them’, a likely reference to the Manchester-based *Coronation Street*, which had started the previous year and was seen as a challenge to the BBC’s southern metropolitan bias. From the outset the ‘northernness’ of *Z Cars* was equated with its mission to show life, and policing, as it was. Kennedy Martin did not envisage *Z Cars* as being ‘anti-police’. On the contrary ‘one of our prime duties will be to the Lancashire Police ... and what we want to capture is the flavour, the humour, the vitality of this part of England and if we don’t they will never forgive us’.¹²

By September 1961 the series had been given the go-ahead and in October Kennedy Martin paid another visit to Lancashire Police, this time with David E. Rose, producer of *Z Cars* throughout its original run, and Allan Prior. Then 38, Prior was an experienced writer for radio and television and he knew Lancashire from first hand, having lived for some years in Blackpool. He and Kennedy Martin provided scripts for 11 of the first 13 *Z Cars* episodes and he contributed regularly to the series thereafter. The trip was designed to build on Kennedy Martin’s April reconnaissance and ensure that the series got the detail right, even down to the police uniforms. The trio spent time in Seaforth and Kirkby and went out on four patrols with the crime cars. They painted a slightly more positive picture of Kirkby than Kennedy Martin had done but stressed the difficulty of building a community spirit and highlighted the destructive behaviour by young people due to the lack of a stable home life. The crime patrol men were described as young officers keen to make their way in the force, with a ‘first-aid’ function of controlling a situation while waiting for the CID to arrive.¹³ *Z Cars*, therefore, was the outcome of considerable first-hand research, augmented by material

supplied by former police officers, notably Bill Prendergast and a retired CID superintendent, Cecil Lindsay. Between them they received credits for 25 of the first 100 episodes.¹⁴ BBC publicity preceding the first episode refers to *Z Cars* as a 'drama-documentary'¹⁵ and to reinforce this no cast lists were given in *Radio Times* throughout the four years of the original run.

The first episode 'Four of a Kind' (2 January 1962) was a scene-setter, charting the recruitment of the crime car crews in response to the fatal shooting of a police constable while on duty in Newtown. It was written by Kennedy Martin and directed by John McGrath. Only 26, McGrath was born in Birkenhead, educated at Oxford and worked in the theatre before joining the BBC script editing department. It soon became apparent that this was no traditional television representation of the police. It opens with the detectives, Charlie Barlow and John Watt, casually smoking and exchanging sardonic banter after the funeral of their murdered colleague. We enter the home of PC Bob Steele, soon to be on one of the Z cars crews, and witness stark evidence of domestic violence. His wife has a black eye and the remains of yesterday's hot-pot which she threw at him have stained the wall. We also learn that Watt's wife has left him. PC Bert Lynch, who is to join Steele in the crime car, likes to bet on horses, even when on duty. Lynch also displays coarse eating habits. Although press reaction was almost uniformly enthusiastic, the BBC found itself having to defend *Z Cars* on several other fronts.

The first was the police themselves. Colonel Eric St Johnston, Chief Constable of Lancashire, had initially supported the project and offered his force's co-operation. But Mrs Steele's black eye, Lynch's gambling and PC Fancy Smith dancing in the street to music coming from a pub were too much and the day after the first episode was screened he came to London to ask the BBC to cancel the series. He was received by Stuart Hood, Controller of Television Programmes, who defended the programme while agreeing to remove the acknowledgement to the Lancashire Constabulary from the credits. Hood admitted to Kenneth Adam that 'a great deal of the trouble arises from the misconception that these are documentary and not fictional programmes', an interesting retreat from the BBC's earlier stress on the programme's documentary credentials. But Hood was fortified by the overwhelmingly positive reception in the national press and by being told privately by Palfrey and Roberts that they thought their

boss was being unduly alarmed. They had been enthusiastic about the first episode and told Hood this had been shared by their contacts at Scotland Yard.¹⁶

St Johnston, however, continued to express his disquiet. Although the credit to the Lancashire force was dropped, the BBC continued to send him advance scripts. St Johnston's main criticism was that 'you still make the police officers, mainly by their expressions, to be uneducated men. We have very few uneducated men in the police today'. More generally, 'although matters have simmered down considerably here in Lancashire, there is still pretty adverse feeling both within the police and among members of the public ... As a result of the manner in which you have depicted the police officers, a great deal of damage has been done to the good relations that have heretofore existed between the police in general and the BBC'.¹⁷ The BBC tried to be conciliatory, agreeing to change scripts on specific points, but in February St Johnston repeated his concern at the police 'using ill-educated expressions and speaking in an uncouth manner' and warned that unless the BBC was prepared to accept his criticisms he would not be prepared to give further help. He also threatened to write to Greene.¹⁸

By presenting *Z Cars* as a documentary drama, and inviting the police to comment on scripts, the BBC was laying itself open to criticisms of inaccuracies and misrepresentation. But while it might get small things wrong, the broad picture does appear to correspond with contemporary reality. During the original run of *Z Cars* a barrister, Ben Whitaker, wrote what claimed to be 'the first radical analysis of the role of the police in our society'.¹⁹ In the opening *Z Cars* episode the nature of police work, with its long, unpredictable and anti-social hours, is blamed for the tension between Steele and his wife and for the break-up of Watt's marriage. Whitaker offers no statistics of divorce among the police but suggests that family tensions are the most important factor in officers leaving the force early.²⁰ St Johnston's complaint that *Z Cars* misrepresented the police as 'uneducated' seems puzzling, given that no more than 32% of the normal entry had one or more passes at O Level and only 1% two or more A level passes.²¹ Perhaps St Johnston, who had been to Cambridge University and practised as a barrister before being fast-tracked into the force, was trying to rationalise from his own background.

Another criticism of *Z Cars* was that it showed the police unable to solve crimes

or to secure convictions. This may, as critics (not just from the police) argued, have given the message that crime pays, but the figures support the programme. While the number of indictable crimes known to the police in England and Wales had steadily risen, the clear-up rate was falling and in 1962 was just under 44%.²² Kennedy Martin later claimed that there was quiet police pressure 'to show how criminals were properly caught' and 'there were lots of modifications and excisions'. He gave this as one of the reasons why he resigned after only a few months.²³ Kenneth Adam, the Director of Television, offered a different version, that Kennedy Martin 'was determined to write scripts which were anti-police and, when directed to do otherwise, refused to have anything more to do with the series'.²⁴ Given Kennedy Martin's earlier determination to do right by the Lancashire force, this seems odd, though he might have become irked by St Johnston's criticisms. A further charge, that the police behaved little better than the criminals, came from Dr Donald Soper, the left-wing Methodist minister, who wrote that '*Z Cars* destroys genuine respect for the law by blurring the real divisions between right and wrong. Both sides of the law are smeared with self-indulgence and moral indifference'. He particularly objected to Barlow's aggressive interrogation of suspects and a police assault on a man suspected of child murder.²⁵

Kirkby Urban District Council was also unhappy. It was no secret that Kirkby was the model for Newtown which *Radio Times*, previewing the series, described as a 'North of England overspill estate' where 'a mixed community, displaced from larger towns by slum clearance, has been brought together and housed on an estate without amenities and without community feeling'. Moreover, it was an area 'fraught with danger for policemen'.²⁶ Even before the series started, W. Byron, Clerk to the Council, wrote to the BBC saying he was anxious that Kirkby should not be identifiable and it would be unfair if it was 'linked with criminal activities'.²⁷ He sent a further letter after the first episode.²⁸ The BBC said there was no intention to portray Kirkby or any other town and care would be taken to discard any film shots which did this. It pointed out that only five seconds of footage in episode one had been shot in Kirkby, from which it could not be identified.²⁹

While *Z Cars* drew on actual cases, and tried to get the policing detail right, the Lancashire setting which was part of the claim to realism was largely created in the

studio at the BBC Television Centre in West London. This followed from a decision to transmit the programmes live. Although film and video recording were available, they were expensive. It was also felt that going out live would give the series a freshness and immediacy that a recording would lack (even if actors might sometimes miss cues or fluff lines and cameras come into shot). In the studio the director had five cameras at his disposal and up to 15 sets. The crime cars were also in the studio, mounted on wooden rollers, with back projection to give the appearance of movement.³⁰ There would usually be a number of filmed inserts, shot either at the nearby Ealing Studios or on location. The locations were sometimes in Lancashire but more often in West London. It made economic sense to stay near Television Centre. The actors lived in London and to send them to the North meant train fares (first-class), hotels and meals. Only six of the first 63 episodes included film shot in the North.³¹ In visual terms the ‘northernness’ of *Z Cars* was largely a mirage and the series had a different look from the New Wave films shot in Lancashire, *A Taste of Honey*, *A Kind of Loving* and *The Entertainer*, which made strong use of landscape.

Nor, despite Kennedy Martin’s hope that it might unearth another Albert Finney, did *Z Cars* make much use of northern actors. Stratford Johns (Barlow) was from South Africa, Frank Windsor (Watt) from Walsall and Jeremy Kemp (Steele) from Chesterfield. James Ellis (Lynch) was from Belfast and Joseph Brady (Weir) from Glasgow. Brian Blessed (Fancy Smith) was from the North, but Yorkshire not Lancashire. The first (and only) Lancashire-born actor to play one of six leading roles was Colin Welland from Leigh. Apart from Ellis and Brady, who kept their natural accents, the cast adopted a functional northernness, with flat vowels and lots of ‘ayes’ but no broad Lancashire. One critic, presumably from the South, was wide of the mark in applauding ‘the power and comic resources of the unjustly maligned Liverpool dialect’.³²

For Kennedy Martin and McGrath, *Z Cars* was intended to be more than a series about the police. As McGrath put it, they wanted ‘to use the cops as a key or a way of getting into a whole society’. The series was to be ‘a kind of documentary about people’s lives in those areas [Kirkby and Seaport] and the cops incidental’. But the police became the stars and ‘the pressure was on to make them the subjects, rather than

the device'.³³ For Elwyn Jones, however, the police were central: 'It is a programme about the police. It is not about crime; it is not about criminals; it is about those men without whom we could not sleep easily in our beds.'³⁴ Ironically the Kennedy Martin-McGrath first episode is mostly about the police, on and off duty, and gives little space to the society in which they operate. However there are references to Newtown as 'like the Wild West' and 'a bit of a jungle' and when Steele goes into a house to deal with a young man who has gone berserk with an axe he gets no help from the crowd which has gathered. There is a similar scene in another Kennedy Martin episode, 'Friday Night' (6 February 1962) in which Steele, again, struggles to cope with a fatal motorcycle accident and cannot get help from a group of onlookers. Whitaker notes a traditional resentment and mistrust of the police in some working-class districts, stemming from a feeling that they represent a hostile establishment. In 'parts of Liverpool and some housing estates in north-west England [*Z Cars* country] the police live like a race apart - occasionally in almost siege conditions with their windows being broken twice a year'.³⁵ The scenes quoted do not go as far as that but they do demonstrate a gulf between police and community.

'The Big Catch' (30 January 1962) is more about society than the police, while illustrating another theme of early *Z Cars* episodes, a non-judgmental treatment of the social roots of deviancy. Prior's script, based on incidents related to him by a Lancashire detective, starts with Norwegian whalers docking in Seaport after six months in the Antarctic, flush with money and looking for a good time. Hoping to exploit them are two types of prostitute, 'professionals' who travel up from London and local girls who have turned to prostitution to make ends meet. The episode focuses on one of the latter, Margaret, an unmarried 22-year-old with a baby. She makes for the pub where the whalers are congregating and steals £500 from the pocket of one of them as he lies, drunk, in an upstairs bedroom. She is arrested but most of the money is recovered and the sailor does not want to press charges. This is no neat ending. The police are relieved to get the whalers off their patch but they will be back and so will Margaret. The script does not judge Margaret (nor do the police) but merely shows the reality of her existence. It well illustrates the Kennedy Martin-McGrath project to explore the wider society. The police, for the most part, are peripheral to the narrative and do not appear in several of the scenes.

McGrath was correct in saying that the police became the stars of the series. Although the actors were not named in *Radio Times* (they were, however, credited on screen) they soon attracted a large following. A couple of months after the series began, David E. Rose noted: 'We are receiving a great many requests from viewers for photos of members of our cast and autographs. Also, the cast themselves are receiving similar requests.'³⁶ Whether this skewed the emphasis away from exploring society to a narrower focus on police work is debatable, as a later episode 'A Place of Safety' (24 June 1964) demonstrates.³⁷

It was written by John Hopkins, who succeeded Kennedy Martin and McGrath as the main creative force on the series. Turning 31 in the month *Z Cars* first went on the air, he took an English degree at Cambridge and joined the BBC television drama department in the late 1950s. He started on *Z Cars* as script editor and went on to write 52 episodes (more than anybody else) before he left the series in October 1964. Based on material from Prendergast, 'A Place of Safety' opens with Wallace, a court officer, trying to serve a warrant on a man in a block of flats. The man, Sadik, attacks Wallace with a hatchet and knocks him unconscious, fracturing his skull. The police are called and Sadik is arrested. Sadik is black, allowing Hopkins to explore attitudes towards race both among the police and the public. It is a horrible assault but there is mitigation. Although Sadik, from West Africa, has a trade (welding) he cannot get work. With a wife and children to support he is 'near starving'. His Indian wife, Nana, has been buying television sets and other goods on hire purchase and Sadik has been selling them off. The summonses against him are for hire purchase debts. It also emerges that Wallace (a former policeman) is a 'right bad beggar' who has been over-zealous in carrying out his duties.

Barlow, who is not usually known for his sensitivity, tries to ignore Sadik's colour and get the wider picture. He is puzzled why a man who has never hurt anybody in his life 'suddenly comes up and clobbers a bloke with a hatchet'. Lowther, Wallace's boss, accuses Barlow of being soft on Sadik because he is coloured. Barlow retorts: 'I'm scared I'll be hard on him - double hard - because he's coloured.' He also has to face the wrath of Nana, who is convinced that because Sadik is coloured he will not get fair treatment: 'You would like to be different, perhaps, like to think you are but you aren't.' Watt, normally more emollient, seems less sympathetic, particularly to

the plight of Nana as she and the children are evicted from the flat. There are different shades of reaction, too, among the crime car crews. Fancy Smith says he can't tell one black from another while Jock Weir echoes Barlow in wanting 'to know why'.

Lowther has no sympathy for Sadik, telling Barlow: 'My men have to . . . go in amongst those savages, into their stinking holes, every day of their lives.' Mrs Lunt, caretaker of the flats, is more openly racist, calling Sadik a 'blackie' and telling how she read 'where one of them blackies did his whole family in'. The one member of the public sympathetic to Sadik is Isaacs, an elderly Jew who lives across the street. It seems not coincidental that Isaacs is from another persecuted minority.

Again there is no neat ending. Despite Barlow's attempt to be open-minded, Sadik is due in court the next morning and faces ten years in prison, leaving his wife and children homeless and without money. When a call comes in about a warehouse robbery, Fancy says 'thank God for that'. The crime cars are relieved to get back to something they understand and can deal with. 'A Place of Safety' not only uses the police 'as a way of getting into a whole society' but also fulfils Kennedy Martin's aspiration to 'break down the dominance of the story line and put in its place character and dialogue'.³⁸ The narrative is driven not by what happened, which is soon established, but trying to unravel why.

From the moment *Z Cars* appeared comparisons were made with *Dixon of Dock Green*. The refrain was always the same. *Dixon* was bland and cosy, *Z Cars* showed policing as it really was. Derek Hill contrasted 'the saintly Dixon, too good to be true' with 'the harassed Z Car driver making the best of an unenviable job'.³⁹ One clear contrast was that while *Z Cars* often left loose ends, with the criminal either not getting caught or going unpunished, or, as in 'A Place of Safety', a family split up and facing a bleak future, *Dixon* invariably presented a neat resolution. In the real world *Z Cars* was nearer to the truth. Far from solving every crime, the Metropolitan Police (Dixon's force) had a clear-up rate in 1962 of 24.6%. Among the less serious crimes, which provided the bulk of *Dixon*'s material, only 15.6% of housebreakings were cleared up and only 8.5% of thefts from vehicles.⁴⁰ In the real world, again, the demands of police work often put a strain on family life. *Z Cars* reflected this while *Dixon* portrayed an ideal fusion of work and domesticity with Dixon's daughter happily married to his CID colleague, Andy Crawford. An early *Dixon* episode, 'Father in Law' (1 September

1956), was largely devoted to the wedding. In 'The Rotten Apple' (8 November 1956) Andy and the woman sergeant complain that while most people work an eight-hour day, the police are never off duty. But this is no more than banter.⁴¹

Although not picked up by commentators to the same extent, the formal contrast between the two series was just as striking. Both were essentially studio productions, transmitted live, with filmed inserts. But *Z Cars* was a much sharper presentation, with a greater use of close-ups for dramatic emphasis and more rapid cutting from scene to scene. In 'A Place of Safety' there were 83 scenes, which meant a change of scene on average every 36 seconds, and 254 camera shots.⁴² *Dixon* was a more static format, with no equivalent of the crime cars to give it pace and urgency. Adam, for one, had noted the difference: 'I imagine due attention is being paid to the new *Dixon* series, so that odious comparisons are not made with *Z Cars*. I know it isn't meant to be the same thing but it cannot afford to be noticeably less polished, for instance, or professional. I am terribly afraid less it appear "amateurish"'.⁴³

Ted Willis, who created *Dixon* and was responsible for the scripts up to 1963, mounted a robust defence. He did not seek to criticise *Z Cars*, of which he declared himself 'a terrific fan'. Rather, he argued that *Dixon* and *Z Cars* showed different aspects of policing, one based on the beat officer and the other on crime patrol cars, and *Dixon* was no less 'real'. He added; 'Go into any London police station, and most others throughout the country, and you will find a Dixon. I know these men and meet them regularly.' Moreover, every story used as a basis for a *Dixon* episode had come either from police files or a newspaper clipping.⁴⁴ *Dixon*, like *Z Cars*, was the product of first-hand research. Kennedy Martin did his on Merseyside, Willis in the dockland areas of East London and at Paddington Green police station.⁴⁵

A further difference between the two series did much to shape their respective tones. *Z Cars* was designed as an ensemble piece, with half a dozen regular characters, not all of whom appeared in every episode, and was cast from little-known actors. *Dixon* was a star vehicle for Jack Warner. From his films and earlier career in variety, Warner had established a persona, warm, decent, avuncular, which he carried over into his portrayal of George Dixon, first seen in the cinema in *The Blue Lamp*. The television series drew not only on a familiar and well-liked personality but a ready-

made character. Equally, it could not function without Warner and this imposed limitations which became more serious as time went on. *Dixon* might be dismissed as cosy, and George Dixon too good to be true, but that derived largely from Warner.⁴⁶ Willis once took a scene from *Z Cars* in which Barlow abused and bullied a young tearaway and reproduced it in a *Dock Green* script with Dixon in place of Barlow. He recalls: 'I might have well whistled in the wind. The words came out in Jack's usual sturdy, decent fashion: the abuse became gentle reproach, the bullying little more than a slight raising of the voice.' Warner was the 'friendly neighbourhood copper' and Willis realised that any attempt to change him would not only be useless but stupid.⁴⁷ Moreover, as Warner got older (he was nearly 60 when the series started and 80 when it finished) he became less mobile and was confined to the station desk. This in turn impacted on the mobility of the narratives. But while in critical estimation *Dixon* was eclipsed by *Z Cars*, it retained a strong and steady following. After a few weeks the *Z Cars* audience reached nearly 16 million but it fell back and by January 1963 *Dixon* had overtaken it, with 13.8 million a week against 12.4 million.⁴⁸ Viewers may have been less bothered than the critics about whether *Dixon* was an authentic representation of policing, or perhaps they wished to believe the cosier version.

Sometimes *Z Cars* tested the BBC's own guidelines. In a Hopkins episode 'Information Received' (10 October 1962) a woman is raped and a man savagely beaten. In both cases the incidents took place off screen but this was still strong meat for a programme transmitted, as *Z Cars* always was, before the 'watershed' (defined by the main evening news at 9.15). The BBC received complaints from viewers and from its West Region Advisory Council. Elwyn Jones was called on by Adam to defend the episode. Jones pointed out that the violence was not made explicit and that the perpetrators had received swift retribution.⁴⁹ But generally the BBC stood by the programme. When a Mrs Gabriel complained that *Z Cars* was setting a bad example by not always bringing criminals to book, and was not satisfied with Hopkins's reply, she took the matter up with Greene. He defended the series without reservation, saying it had performed a valuable function in showing the work of the police as it really was, with failures as well as successes. He argued that this was the opposite of an amoral or negative attitude and concluded: '*Z Cars* is a series of which

the BBC is particularly proud'.⁵⁰ When the original *Z Cars* ended in December 1965 the Board of Governors 'associated itself with the Director-General's expressions of pride in the series and wished its congratulations to be conveyed to all concerned'.⁵¹

The BBC was able to support and defend *Z Cars* initially because of the critical acclaim and degree of public support as shown in the audience figures. As time went on it faced less hostility from the police. Palfrey, the Deputy Chief Constable of Lancashire, said that 'in spite of minor defects *Z Cars* has brought reality into something that is going on. Most of the scenes are not very far removed from actual incidents and I believe the programmes have done nothing to impair relations between the public and the police'.⁵² Sir Joseph Simpson, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, was equally positive: 'When the programmes started there were many people, particularly inside the force, who thought that *Z Cars* would harm the image. But the programme has shown the type of thing which we have to do every day. It has also shown that we cannot do all our duties with kid gloves'.⁵³ When the series came to an end the *Radio Times* tribute came from a policeman, Bill Roberts, former head of Lancashire CID. Recalling that he had been present not only at the birth of *Z Cars* but also at its conception, he thought that the original aim of 'fiction with a strong background of authenticity' had been fully realised. The public had been given a genuine insight into police work, particularly its less glamorous aspects.⁵⁴

In both content and form *Z Cars* represented a radical shift for series drama. It took the police series out of London to the industrial North, showed the police, for the first time on television, as flawed and fallible, suggested that criminals were not always caught and punished and used a popular form to explore social issues such as race and prostitution. Having opted for live transmission, it tried to overcome the limitations of studio-based production with fluid camerawork and rapid editing. It can be said that realism was the aim and naturalism the means. But for Kennedy Martin and McGrath, who both left *Z Cars* after the first season, the naturalism of studio drama was too limiting. They wanted to get away from what they saw as an over-reliance on dialogue and a strict adherence to natural time and produce a more flexible narrative that would incorporate such devices as stills, montages and voice-overs.⁵⁵ The naturalism debate was to resurface over *The Wednesday Play*.

Sydney Newman, single drama and *The Wednesday Play*

Although it represented only 6% of the BBC's drama output, *The Wednesday Play* often saw the most innovation and provoked the strongest controversy. It is particularly associated with Sydney Newman, who ran the BBC drama department during its formative years, though it owed much, too, to young producers, directors and writers looking to push out the boundaries. This section will examine the role and impact of Newman, chart the emergence and development of the strand in the context of BBC policy on the single play, assess the approaches of different producers and cite the work of Dennis Potter to argue against easy pigeonholing of *The Wednesday Play* as contemporary social drama. Discussion will then move to the plays themselves, with *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home* used to engage with the debate about naturalism and explore public and critical reaction to new forms and radical content.

Z Cars had emerged during a hiatus at the top of the BBC drama department. Michael Barry, who had been in charge since 1950, left in September 1961. Unusually, the BBC went to ITV to fill the vacancy, reversing a stronger trend the other way, and Newman was the only prominent executive to serve under Greene who was recruited from outside. Being a Canadian he was an outsider in a double sense. Not only did he come to the job untainted by BBC thinking but unlike most BBC drama producers, who had received their grounding in the theatre, he had worked solely in television, first in the United States for NBC and then in Britain for ABC's *Armchair Theatre*. He preferred drama which was created for television to adaptations of plays and books, championed the single play, which he regarded as the highest form of playwriting, over series or serials and saw television drama as a means of exploring changes in society. Under his guidance *Armchair Theatre* became an outlet for young writers such as Alun Owen, Clive Exton and Harold Pinter. He also believed in spreading drama to the widest audience and although *Armchair Theatre* was helped by inheriting a large audience from *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, screened immediately before it, it regularly featured in ITV's ten most popular programmes. Writing in 1962, Philip Purser summed up Newman's contributions to television drama as 'being the first man to impose a recognisable house style on a play series, the first to bring a consistently three-dimensional quality to his productions, the first to insist on every play being *about* something, having a relevance to the Big World outside'.⁵⁶

Newman was headhunted by the BBC, with Adam making the first approaches and Greene, who wanted a dynamic figure to reinvigorate the drama output, concluding the deal. It is a measure of Newman's keenness to take the job that he accepted a significant cut in salary. It is a measure of how badly the BBC wanted him that he was paid more than people senior to him. His appointment was announced early in 1962 but his contract still had 18 months to run and ABC was reluctant to let him go. So he did not join the BBC until December and was not effectively in charge until the start of 1963. By 1966 he was responsible for 660 productions (counting episodes of series and serials) a year, of which only 39 were for *The Wednesday Play*. Despite his preference for single plays and contemporary themes, there were almost 100 episodes a year of dramatisations from classical literature. Again, although he championed realism he was also proud of his part in launching fantasy and adventure series such as *The Avengers* (while at ITV), *Doctor Who* and *Adam Adamant Lives!* Newman described the vast majority of the output as 'entertainment, either "safe" and entertaining or innocuous and entertaining'. It was the small number of dramas which tried to do something more, revealing life and its many complex parts, that 'brings the wrath of the people down on us'.⁵⁷

Although *The Wednesday Play* became a favourite target of Mary Whitehouse, whom Newman privately despised, he was no unbridled libertarian and he frequently felt it necessary to remind his producers, directors and story editors about what he saw as excesses in areas of sexual relations, violence and blasphemy.⁵⁸ Moreover, Newman was in the middle of a long chain of command. He was answerable to the heads of BBC1 and BBC2, the Controller of Television Programmes and the Director of Television, all of whom could, and on occasions did, instruct him to keep his producers in line. At the same time, within the drama department there was a considerable degree of autonomy. Newman believed in delegation and with 660 productions a year to look after he could not scrutinise every one. Although producers were expected to 'refer upwards' on contentious projects, this did not always happen. One example was *For the West* (26 May 1965), a play by Michael Hastings which portrayed in graphic terms the brutalities of the recent civil war in the former Belgian Congo. Adam and Wheldon both thought it was too horrifying to have been shown and Newman, who had not been consulted before transmission, was forced to consider the integrity of his producer,

James MacTaggart, who strongly defended the play, and to address the widespread criticism both within and outside the BBC.⁵⁹

Newman left the BBC in December 1967. He had seen out his five-year contract, got itchy feet and had been offered a tempting job as head of film production at Elstree. That, at least, was his version.⁶⁰ But according to a BBC contemporary, some of the governors had become so disenchanted with *The Wednesday Play* that when Newman's contract ran out 'there was no move to extend it'.⁶¹ Certainly his job was not immediately filled, the official line being that the drama department was sufficiently well organised to run itself. It was 18 months before a new Head of Drama was appointed. He was Shaun Sutton, who had been in BBC Television since 1952 and was regarded as a safe pair of hands.

One of Newman's first initiatives on joining the BBC had been to split drama output into plays, series and serials. He felt that the BBC was well served with series (such as *Maigret*, *Z Cars* and *Dr Finlay's Casebook*, all of which he had inherited) and serials (such as *Jane Eyre* and *Lorna Doone*) but wanted to push for the same success in single plays.⁶² The term 'single play' was misleading for plays were seldom transmitted on their own but usually sheltered under the umbrella of a series title. *Armchair Theatre* was a prime example and Newman set out to repeat the concept at the BBC. He proposed two play strands. *First Night* was to be an outlet for new plays on contemporary subjects aimed at the widest audience, while *Festival*, a celebration of the best in world theatre from the ancient Greeks to Brecht and Beckett, would cater for more educated and discerning tastes.⁶³ The project soon ran into trouble. After a number of plays had aroused criticism, Adam decided that the *Festival* and *First Night* labels were too much of a straightjacket and wanted to revert to the previous policy of naming play series after days of the week. That way 'plays of a more conventional and family character' could be interspersed with the more contentious ones.⁶⁴ Because of the Olympic Games and the general election eating into the BBC1 schedules, Adam decided there could not be a series of original plays between October and December 1964. He told Newman that *Festival* and *First Night* would be scrapped and he suggested *Wednesday Night Theatre* as a 'safer and more practical' title for a short season that could include specially written plays but would mainly be used to get rid of

the *Festival* stockpile.⁶⁵ *Wednesday Night Theatre* was renamed *The Wednesday Play* and first transmitted on 28 October 1964. Far from being intended as a vehicle for original contemporary drama, *The Wednesday Play* started life as a repository of stage adaptations and other 'safe' productions. Moreover, Newman, who had been blamed by his superiors for what they saw as the failure of *First Night* and *Festival*, had been sidelined and played no part in launching it. Only in its second season, starting in January 1965, did *The Wednesday Play* assume its historical identity.

Underlying the debate within the BBC about how the single play should be presented was another, about the very status and future of the form. During 1964 Newman found himself having to defend the single play, particularly those written specially for television, against attacks from the within the BBC and outside. Responding to criticism by the BBC Midland Region Advisory Council that recent plays had been 'lacking in plot and of a very low moral standard', he wrote: 'Because the single play represents the most difficult and highest form of playwriting we must anticipate difficulties with some elements of public opinion. This is especially true if we are to be in the forefront as presenters and stimulators of the finest and most socially useful drama.'⁶⁶ He followed this up in June 1964 with a much angrier memo to Adam after learning that *First Night* 'or a similar play series' would not be returning until the following year. 'The fact that I have been put in a position of having to define the importance to the BBC and the country the necessity of [an original play] series makes me sick.' He recalled that he had been hired by Greene 'to reinstate the BBC's reputation as the home of the best original playwrights in the country' and 'to help create new writers'. He went on to say that 'the single play represents the hopes and aspirations of many people in television and is the keystone of the entire Drama Group'.

Newman saw the main villain as Donald Baverstock, head of BBC1 and his superior. He accused Baverstock of being motivated by the desire to get the bigger audiences which serials and series were likely to provide. Newman said he believed that *First Night* was being dropped to free money and facilities for another weekly series. He was not against having more series and serials to give the BBC bigger audiences 'but not by killing off [*First Night*] which is dedicated to original writing'.⁶⁷ Baverstock retorted that 'I do not question the importance to BBC policy of our

continuing to produce original play series whatever the size of the audiences they attract'. But they needed intense and careful thought to ensure they were successful, which in his view *First Night* had not been.⁶⁸ Adam's reply to Newman and Baverstock was double-edged. There should be a regular weekly slot for specially written plays in the first quarter of 1965. But while he was committed to the single play, he stressed the importance of serials and series in winning back audiences from ITV. This was partly a political consideration: 'With a new government in power after October, whatever its complexion, it is obviously very important indeed that we should get better figures.'⁶⁹

Two years on, with *The Wednesday Play* well established though still attracting criticism, Newman was again having to defend the original single play. In a memorandum to Huw Wheldon he called it 'a pacesetter for television drama' and said it was the only place where the writer could perform his true creative function of interpreting life as he saw it in dramatic form.⁷⁰ By now Newman seemed to be kicking at an open door for in October 1966 Wheldon described *The Wednesday Play* as one of those key series in which (quoting the Pilkington Report) 'broadcasting must be willing to make mistakes; for if it does not, it will make no new discoveries.' He went on: 'Mistakes draw criticism. Discoveries are uncomfortable. Both compel controversy. So does *The Wednesday Play*. We should be surprised - and disappointed - if it did not.'⁷¹

Wheldon had hit upon one of the main arguments against the original single play, that by giving free reign to a writer's imagination to explore contemporary issues it was likely to land the BBC in controversy in a way that the series, with its prescribed format, would not. There was also the economic consideration that the series (or serial), by spreading the cost of scenery, costumes and actors' rehearsal time over several episodes, was cheaper to produce. Finally, with their resident characters and recurring situations, series and serials were likely to attract bigger audiences than one-off dramas which were trips into the unfamiliar. But if the odds were seemingly stacked against *The Wednesday Play*, and executives such as Newman felt compelled to fight its corner, it survived until 1970 and as *Play For Today* (an ironic reversal to a thematic title) ran until 1984. The documentary evidence does not support M. K. MacMurrough-

Kavanagh's contention that there were sustained moves within the BBC to kill off the single play 'once and for all' or that *The Wednesday Play* 'survived the 1960s in spite of the BBC and not because of it'.⁷⁰

The Wednesday Play has tended to become defined by its most famous productions, such as *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home* for which Newman (when Leonard Marsland Gander of the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that they were not really plays but not documentaries either) coined the term 'agitational contemporaneity'.⁷¹ But most of the output was neither contemporaneous nor agitational. With eight productions Dennis Potter was the most prolific contributor to *The Wednesday Play* apart from David Mercer, yet not all were set in the present day. *Alice* was a study of Lewis Carroll, *A Beast With Two Backs* took place in the 1890s and *Son of Man* was a portrait of Jesus Christ. *Message for Posterity* harked back to the Graham Sutherland portrait of Churchill. While *Vote, Vote Vote for Nigel Barton* dealt with politics, none of Potter's work tackled social problems in the manner of *Cathy Come Home*. He declared that he was 'much more concerned with interior drama than with external realities'⁷² and thought that social injustice should be tackled by 'journalism and the essay and political polemic rather than art'.⁷³ *Where the Buffalo Roam* (2 November 1966) has a contemporary resonance in that the central character is a 19-year-old man who is obsessed with Westerns and emulates their violence with tragic results. The effect of the media on social behaviour was an increasing concern during the 1960s, not least within the BBC. But Potter also portrays the young man as a victim of his personality and environment. He is backward and illiterate, has a wretched home life and is humiliated by his peers.

As well as featuring the work of very diverse writers, *The Wednesday Play* seasons took their character to a significant extent from the producers. The first batch of plays from October to December 1964 was produced by Peter Luke, who had been in charge of *Festival*. An old Etonian, he had been a journalist, written plays for television and was a story editor on *Armchair Theatre* before being brought to the BBC by Newman. His tastes were essentially literary and 'he did not consider television drama to be a suitable platform for politics'.⁷⁶ His successor, James MacTaggart, in his thirties and nearly ten years younger, was more politically

committed. He had been in charge of *First Night* and his tenure of *The Wednesday Play* (January-December 1965) saw a shift from Luke's literary adaptations to original plays by Potter, Mercer, John Hopkins and others. Several, including *For the West*, Hopkins's race allegory *Fable* and *Up the Junction*, produced a strong adverse response. Before his return in January 1966 Luke wrote to Newman saying that as his new season would be 'so different from the MacTaggart regime' he suggested holding a press conference.⁷⁷ Luke also tried to change the title sequence with a montage of clips from his own productions but this was rejected.⁷⁸ The press conference took place and the *Daily Mail* quoted Luke as saying: 'I am just tired of kitchen sink drama. My series will have more sophistication and wit. I put entertainment first.' He added that the new season 'will be less class-conscious and plays like *Up the Junction* will not be included'.⁷⁹ Nor were they. Luke's second season had a strong literary flavour, with plays by novelists such as James Hanley, Patrick White, Aldous Huxley and Simon Raven.⁸⁰

After Luke responsibility for *The Wednesday Play* was split between Lionel Harris and Tony Garnett. They were another contrasting pair. Harris had worked extensively in the theatre, particularly for H. M. Tennent, epitome of West End commercial management, while Garnett, a younger man (30 in 1966) had been an actor in television before moving into production. He was a story editor on *The Wednesday Play* during the MacTaggart season, notably on *Up the Junction* where his strongly socialist outlook found a sympathetic echo in the director Ken Loach. Also 30 in 1966, Loach had directed two episodes of *Z Cars*, and worked on the experimental *Diary of Young Man* with MacTaggart, Kennedy Martin and McGrath before moving to *The Wednesday Play*. Garnett's first play as producer, also directed by Loach, was *Cathy Come Home* and he also oversaw works by writers of left-wing views such as Mercer and Jim Allen. Harris, who took charge of the majority of the productions, was a less radical figure, though he oversaw *Where the Buffalo Roam*. The difference between the two men extended to form as well as content. Harris favoured studio-based drama (no longer live but recorded on videotape), while Garnett wanted to get out of the studio and shoot on film.

Directly above the producers was another important figure in the complex chain

of responsibility, the Head of Plays. Newman had initially filled this role himself, before appointing Michael Bakewell, a radio producer. In Newman's phrase 'too sweet and gentle'⁸¹ Bakewell soon gave way to Gerald Savory. He was another man of the theatre, who before the war had had a huge West End success with the comedy, *George and Margaret*. He worked as a writer in Hollywood and as a producer in American television and wrote further plays before joining Granada and then the BBC in the 1960s. His background did not suggest a natural sympathy for *The Wednesday Play* but he defended *Where the Buffalo Roam* against doubters higher up in the BBC, describing it as 'a serious and compassionate piece of work'⁸² and also pressed for an early repeat for *Cathy Come Home*. But a couple of years later he was complaining that the plays were failing to celebrate the good, wondering whether there was anybody apart from Michael Frayn who could write comedy and suggesting there was a straightforward play to be written about 'maddening everyday irritations' such as standing in the rain for a non-arriving bus.⁸³

Such is the context in which *The Wednesday Play* developed with the innovations, in form and content, which made the strand distinctive and often embroiled it in controversy both within the BBC and from outside. The formal initiatives can be considered in relation to Kennedy Martin's attack on naturalism and a related debate about the rival merits of shooting electronically in the studio or on film on location. The two debates came together on *Up the Junction* (3 November 1965), directed by Loach from Nell Dunn's book about life among working-class women in Battersea. Loach and the story editor Garnett were determined to shoot as much as possible on film, though this was not the favoured option in the BBC drama department. With the building of Television Centre the BBC had invested heavily in studio space and wanted it to be fully used. Film was also considerably more expensive. To offset the increased cost Garnett and Loach suggested shooting on 16mm instead of 35mm, and to the objection that this would produce inferior quality footage they pointed to the use of 16mm in news and documentary. *Up the Junction* was to be closer in style to documentary than traditional studio drama. Loach and Garnett did not entirely win the argument and were hampered by a union agreement that a proportion of drama had to be shot in the studio. But in four days on location they filmed half of what was used in

the final assembly.⁸⁴

Although the introduction of videotape meant that drama no longer had to go out live, tape was difficult to edit and plays were often recorded in strict sequence. This imposed the very restrictions which Kennedy Martin equated with naturalism, the reliance on dialogue scenes, the necessity to shoot in natural time and the denial of a more 'open' narrative which could include stills, voice-overs and montage. Although there were studio scenes in *Up the Junction* they were shot (to the consternation of the technicians) in a ciné-vérité style. Instead of predetermined camera positions, the action would begin and the cameraman had to find the shots. Loach further broke the rules by cutting the studio footage onto a 16mm back-up print. This gave him the flexibility of a cinema film. 'Our whole intention at that stage', he recalled, 'was to make films - not studio-based theatre.'⁸⁵

Up the Junction meets Kennedy Martin's main criteria. It eschews a linear narrative and while it does not use flashbacks in the usual sense, within scenes the temporal flow is often broken. A self-contained sequence shows the exploits of the tally man, who makes his money selling goods on credit to vulnerable people and charging them high interest. Within it there are two layers of time. In the present the man drives his car and sits in a pub, while in the past we see him in scenes with his clients. Secondly, the dialogue is far removed from the theatricality of televised theatre, consisting not of rounded conversations but, much nearer to real speech, fragments of sentences often competing with other voices. From time to time dialogue becomes monologue as characters (such as the tally man) address the camera directly, as if being interviewed in a documentary. Like Peter Watkins on *Culloden*, Loach was influenced by the 'raw, edgy quality' of the current affairs programme, *World in Action*.⁸⁶ Furthermore, there are elaborate montages of voices, both on and off screen, and sounds, particularly of contemporary pop songs whose words often provide an ironic commentary.⁸⁷

Loach and Garnett argued that such formal strategies were only possible by shooting on film, and by editing at the post-production stage. On the other hand Potter's autobiographical *Stand Up, Nigel Barton* (12 December 1965) uses some of the same devices within a drama that follows the conventional pattern of a studio

production with filmed inserts. Indeed Potter declared himself to be one of the few television writers who preferred electronics to film: 'I think the studio calls on the writer more than film does. I dread television being turned into a director's medium in the same sense that cinema is.'⁸⁸ As in *Up the Junction* actors speak straight to camera, for example when Nigel, the working-class boy who has won a scholarship to Oxford, cheekily reminds us, apropos his privileged university life, 'don't worry, folks, you're paying for it'. The narrative moves back and forward in time, from Nigel's present in Oxford and at home with his parents in the Forest of Dean, to his schoolboy days. Potter also uses contemporary pop songs to counterpoint the narrative, most vividly 'We gotta get out of this place' by the Animals, which comes up over both Oxford and Forest of Dean scenes and underscores Nigel's feeling of 'walking a tightrope between two different worlds'. But *Stand Up, Nigel Barton* does not try to emulate the fragmentary dialogue of *Up the Junction* and being a studio production cannot attempt its elaborate montages. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine Loach and Garnett using adult actors to play children as Potter does in the schoolroom scenes (and would do throughout *Blue Remembered Hills*). Potter, no less than Loach and Garnett, wants to escape the limits of naturalism as defined by Kennedy Martin but while they are trying to show the specific social reality of working-class life in Battersea he wants us to engage with a wider argument about class and education.

Up the Junction provoked one of the fiercest reactions to any *Wednesday Play* thus far, though the formal innovations were generally applauded. Praising the 'off the cuff filming' against actual backgrounds and the 'fragmented, impressionistic script' Philip Purser likened the play to 'a Denis Mitchell documentary, only with actors instead of people'.⁸⁹ Nancy Banks-Smith said the dialogue 'was so true to life it was like an echo in my head'.⁹⁰ Peter Black praised the 'remarkable technical brilliance' of the script and camerawork in producing an authentic world.⁹¹ What caused offence was the subject matter. The BBC switchboard logged 464 adverse calls and only 50 in favour ⁹² and even critics generally supportive of challenging drama found the production hard to take. Describing *Up the Junction* as 'one crowded hour of South London life. Birth, lovemaking and death - all with the door open', Banks-Smith went on: 'It's hard for a family to watch life as bloody and near to the bone as that. In the

living room, with the light on'. She concluded: 'I'm not certain we can, as family groups, take quite so much of the truth as that. But the BBC honours us in believing that we can.'⁹³

Black suspected that 'the *Wednesday Play* boys' were seeing how far they could go in a television play with sex and cuss words. The language was 'often unbelievably coarse', though it is free of four-letter words and innocuous by later standards. It is probably not the language as such but the uninhibited way in which the women talk about their relationships with men, and particularly about sex, which was considered shocking. Black seemed to acknowledge this. In a shrewd analysis of why the play 'caused such an uproar' he identified three reasons. First, 'a lot of people genuinely dislike seeing the unpleasant realities of life - and to such this play was one long unpleasant reality - emphasised'. Secondly, 'others cannot bear looking at working-class life unless it is respectable. The anarchy of this play must have frozen the blood'. Thirdly, 'there is another section that has sex on the brain and is driven almost crazy by any reference to it'. Black concluded that the BBC must have known that the theme and language of the play 'would deeply offend and shock a lot of people'.⁹⁴ It did, and for that reason the governors opposed an early repeat and *Up the Junction* was not shown again until 1977.

The critical reception a year later for *Cathy Come Home* (16 November 1966), from a script by Jeremy Sandford about a young family which becomes homeless, divided on similar lines. It is a myth that 'the television critics raved about the production and reflected the nationwide outcry at the system the play exposed'.⁹⁵ There was praise but there were also serious reservations. While *Up the Junction* was a mixture of film and studio footage, *Cathy Come Home*, with Garnett now producer and Loach again directing, was shot entirely on film apart from a few token minutes to satisfy union agreements. Banks-Smith called it 'technically a staggering job of work, shot almost wholly where it might have happened. In the streets, in the slums, on the human rubbish dumps'. She noted that 'the dialogue, too, was tape-recorder authentic, sometimes disjointed, sometimes distorted by background noise'.⁹⁶ For Black the authentic dialogue, with words often tossed away, spoken by actors it was hard to believe were actors, and 'the despairingly ugly streets that Granada ruthlessly

sentimentalises in *Coronation Street*’ worked up an atmosphere of fierce reality in which the audience became deeply involved.⁹⁷

But he had misgivings about the content. He called it ‘a poster play’, with ‘starkly black and white values and borrowing a good deal from the Communist Party line on housing’. Authority was shown as harsh and unfeeling while among the homeless were no feckless drunks or criminals, only the unlucky. Cathy and Reg [the parents] ‘were so deserving as to be implausible’.⁹⁸ Purser made similar points, declaring that ‘Cathy and Reg weren’t people at all, they were Victims’ and concluding: ‘How can I make it clear that I am excited and impressed by his [Loach’s] work, that I was naturally distressed by Jeremy Sandford’s sad chronicle of events, that I’m sure the play did a great service to social education, but I am certain it did a terrible disservice to television drama’.⁹⁹

There was another problematic aspect to *Cathy Come Home*. During the abortion scene in *Up the Junction* (which has become notorious, though contemporary critics barely mentioned it) a doctor’s voice tells us that 35 women a year die of backstreet abortions and many women who do survive are unable to have more babies. It was a deliberate ploy to support David Steel’s Abortion Bill then going through Parliament but arguably incongruous in a drama that was trying to present a segment of British life and leaving the viewer to judge. *Cathy Come Home*, by contrast, used carefully selected statistics throughout, delivered by an anonymous voiceover, to highlight the extent of homelessness in Britain. Not only that, but the voice comments on them: ‘The present target of 500,000 [new homes] set by the government is not high enough. Even if it is realised there would still be people living in slums ten years from now. What’s needed is a government that realises that this is a crisis and treats it as such.’ Again, ‘there exists in local authorities a kind of punitive attitude which means that the whole problem of homeless families is the Cinderella of Cinderellas’. *Cathy Come Home* was breaking two of the cardinal rules of BBC policy. It was editorialising, putting forward comment, and it was unbalanced, presenting one side of the argument and allowing no space for a reply.¹⁰⁰

Yet within the BBC there were few reservations. Savory, Head of Plays, wanted a repeat as soon as possible ‘while it is still a burning topic of conversation’¹⁰¹ and

received sympathetic backing from Michael Peacock, Controller of BBC1. The repeat took place on 11 January 1967. Oliver Whitley, effectively Greene's deputy, was unhappy about the screening of housing statistics and a comparison on housebuilding between Britain and West Germany between the end of the play and the credits and thought they would have been better 'inside' the play. But he 'admired the play itself even more the second time I saw it'.¹⁰² Two factors were working in the BBC's favour. First was the overwhelmingly favourable public response. *Cathy Come Home* was seen by 12 million people and had a reaction index of 78, compared with an average of 54 for other recent *Wednesday Play* productions.¹⁰³ The second was the response from central government.

Local authorities, which had been portrayed in the play as bureaucratic and unfeeling, were hostile. Alderman Frank Griffin, the Conservative leader of Birmingham City Council, was invited to watch the play by the local newspaper and declared that it was 'a completely false impression' which presented the 'they' of authority in a most unpleasant and untrue light.¹⁰⁴ Laurence Evans, head of the Local Government Information Office and speaking for local councils in general, went further. He accused the play of misrepresenting what was being done to help the homeless, particularly by local authorities, and claimed that there were more deserving cases than Cathy and Reg, 'a feckless and irresponsible young couple who entered marriage, took on an expensive flat and started having babies without one whit of thought for the future'.¹⁰⁵ But it was the attitude of the government in Westminster, with which the BBC's relations had been severely strained,¹⁰⁶ that may have proved decisive.

A Labour government could have been particularly sensitive to the charge, made explicitly in *Cathy Come Home*, of failing to tackle homelessness. On 29 November the play was seen by Anthony Greenwood, the Minister of Housing and Local government, Kenneth Robinson, the Minister of Health, and two other ministers, Douglas Houghton and Cledwyn Hughes. They were all 'very impressed and their only criticisms were on minor matters of detail', such as the captions at the end.¹⁰⁷ Two days later Loach, Sandford and Garnett met Greenwood. Garnett described it as 'a friendly chat' during which the Minister asked for their suggestions on how to improve

Garnett added: 'We were not challenged at any point, either on our intentions in making the film or on our facts.'¹⁰⁸ As far as central government was concerned the BBC was in the clear.

The Wednesday Play as a slot for original drama evolved more by accident than design and was never a homogenous body of work. Although its existence as the spearhead of the single play had to be fought for, there was no serious attempt to downgrade it. It gave opportunities to young producers, writers and directors (such as MacTaggart, Garnett, Loach, Dunn, Potter) who were determined to change the face of television drama, both in formal terms, particularly in the use of film rather than videotape, and in engaging with the realities of contemporary Britain. Although the vast majority of *Wednesday Plays* (in themselves a tiny fraction of BBC drama output) proved uncontroversial, a small number severely tested the BBC's commitment to taste and impartiality.

Notes

1. Peter Knight, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1962.
2. See, for instance, *The Times*, 3 January 1962; Maurice Wiggin, *Sunday Times*, 7 January 1962.
3. Susan Sydney-Smith, *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), contains the fullest account of the forerunners to *Z Cars*.
4. BBC WAC T5/2506/1: Elwyn Jones to W. J. H. Palfrey, 22 March 1961.
5. BBC WAC T5/2506/3: R. G. Walford, Head of Copyright, to Gerald Samuels and Shine [solicitors], 21 August 1963. Walford was replying to a claim by another writer to have had the idea for *Z Cars*.
6. Ibid.
7. BBC WAC T5/2506/1: 'Crime Car or Z Cars Series', report by Kennedy Martin, undated.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

10. John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp 57-78
11. Quoted in Michael Barry, *From the Palace to the Grove* (London: Royal Television Society, 1992), p 71.
12. BBC WAC T5/2506/: 'Crime Car or Z Cars Series', op cit.
13. BBC WAC T5/2506/1. The report, which runs to 14 pages, is based on 'information gleaned between 15 and 19 October 1961'.
14. Elwyn Jones in *Radio Times*, 27 February 1964, p 33.
15. BBC WAC T5/2506/1. The document is undated.
16. BBC WAC T5/2506/2: Hood to Kenneth Adam, 4 January 1962.
17. BBC WAC T16/577: St Johnston to Hood, 17 January 1962.
18. Ibid, 20 February 1962.
19. Ben Whitaker, *The Police* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964). The book was one of a series of Penguin Specials representing what Whitaker called 'a new readiness in Britain today to take a fresh look at institutions which have long been taken for granted' (p 11). Such questioning was characteristic of the 1960s, not least in the BBC. The book drew on interviews with officers of all ranks and presented original research.
20. Ibid, p 73.
21. Ibid, p 98.
22. Ibid, p 39.
23. Sean Day-Lewis, *Views of the Television Dramatist Now and Then* (Luton: Luton University Press, 1998), p 210.
24. BBC WAC T5/2506/2: Adam to Hugh Greene, 20 November 1962.
25. Soper in *Tribune*, quoted in *The Listener*, 3 May 1962, p 787.
26. *Radio Times*, December 1961, p 26.
27. BBC WAC T5/2506/2: W. Byron to Stuart Hood, 6 December 1961.
28. Ibid: Byron to Hood, 3 January 1962.
29. Ibid. The letters are in draft form, the first dated 19 December 1961, the second undated.
30. Peter Lewis, 'Z Cars', *Contrast*, vol 1 no 4, Summer 1962, p 309.

31. Stuart Laing, *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1957-64* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p 170.
32. *The Times*, 6 January 1962.
33. 'Better a Bad Night in Bootle ... ', interview with John McGrath, *Theatre Quarterly*, vol V no 19, September-November 1975, p 43.
34. *Radio Times*, 27 February 1964, p 33. Jones was introducing the 100th episode.
35. Whitaker, op cit, p 28.
36. BBC WAC T5/2506/2: Rose to Norman Rutherford, Acting Head of Drama, 9 March 1962.
37. Of the 170 episodes transmitted between 1962 and 1965 only a handful have survived. Analysis of 'A Place of Safety' is based on the script, held at the BBC Written Archives Centre.
38. Quoted in Lewis, op cit, p 313.
39. *The Listener*, 3 May 1962, p 787.
40. Whitaker, op cit, p 41.
41. As with *Z Cars*, few of the *Dixon* episodes have survived. Only two from the 1950s, and none from the 1960s, were available for viewing at the National Film and Television Archive (June 2004).
42. Laing, op cit, p 171.
43. BBC WAC T12/779/1: Adam to Hood, 3 August 1962.
44. *The Listener*, 17 May 1962, p 859.
45. Ted Willis, *Evening All: Fifty Years Over a Hot Typewriter* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p 124.
46. Willis also pointed out that *Dixon* went out at 6.30pm on Saturdays, when it attracted a large audience of children. This limited what they could show and '70% of the material used in *Z Cars* could not be used in our programmes'. *The Listener*, 17 May 1962, p 859.
47. Willis, *Evening All*, p 125.
48. BBC figures, quoted in the *Daily Mail*, 21 January 1963.
49. BBC WAC T5/2462/1: Elwyn Jones to Adam, 17 October 1962.
50. BBC WAC T16/734: Greene to Mrs R. F. Gabriel, 11 January 1963.

51. BBC WAC T5/710/1: Minutes of BBC Controllers' meeting, 21 December 1965.
52. *Liverpool Echo*, 27 May 1963.
53. *Daily Mirror*, 24 November 1964.
54. 'Goodbye Z Cars', *Radio Times*, 16 December 1965, pp 25-27.
55. Troy Kennedy Martin, 'Nats Go Home: First Statement of a New Drama for Television', *Encore*, vol 1 no 2, March-April 1964, pp 21-33; John McGrath, 'TV Drama: The Case Against Naturalism', *Sight and Sound*, vol 46 no 2, Spring 1977, pp 100-105.
56. *Contrast*, vol 2 no 1, Autumn 1962, p 33.
57. BBC WAC T5/695/2: Newman to Huw Wheldon, Controller of Television Programmes, 15 June 1966.
58. BBC WAC T16/162/2 contains memos from Newman on these subjects in October 1963, March 1964 and June and November 1965.
59. BBC WAC T5/1398/1 contains the correspondence relating to *For the West*.
60. BECTU History Project: Sydney Newman interviewed by Norman Swallow, 19 June 1990.
61. Leonard Miall, *The Independent*, 4 November 1994.
62. BBC WAC T16/62/3: Newman to Stuart Hood, 9 September 1963.
63. Ibid.
64. BBC WAC T16/62/3: minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 24 January 1964.
65. Ibid: Adam to Newman and Donald Baverstock, Chief of Programmes BBC1, 13 July 1964.
66. Ibid: Newman to Hood, 1 May 1964.
67. Ibid: Newman to Adam, 26 June 1964.
68. Ibid: Baverstock to Adam, 1 July 1964.
69. Ibid Adam to Newman and Baverstock, 13 July 1964.
70. BBC WAC T5/695/2: Newman to Wheldon, 15 June 1966.
71. BBC WAC T16/373: *The Wednesday Play* Aims and Policy, Note by Wheldon, 3 October 1966.
72. M. K. MacMurrough-Kavanagh, 'The BBC and the Birth of "The Wednesday Play", 1962-66: Institutional Containment Versus "Agitational Contemporaneity"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol 17

- no 3 (1997), p 367.
73. BECTU History Project, op cit.
74. Potter interviewed by Paul Madden, programme notes for a National Film Theatre season, 'British Television Drama, 1959-73', 11-24 October 1976.
75. John R. Cook, *Dennis Potter: A Life on Screen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p 139.
76. Irene Shubik, *Play for Today: The Evolution of Television Drama* (2nd ed, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p 59.
77. BBC WAC T5/695/1: Luke to Newman, 8 December 1965.
78. BBC WAC T5/695/1: Michael Bakewell, Head of Plays, to Luke, 13 December 1965.
79. *Daily Mail*, 4 January 1966. 'Kitchen sink' had become the popular term for contemporary working-class dramas.
80. A complete list of *Wednesday Play* productions is in Shubik, op cit, pp 42-54.
81. BECTU History Project, op cit.
82. BBC WAC R78/1919/1: Savory to Adam, 20 October 1966.
83. BBC WAC T5/695/4: Savory to Irene Shubik and Graeme McDonald (who had succeeded Harris and Garnett), 23 December 1968.
84. Graham Fuller, ed, *Loach on Loach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p 13.
85. Ibid, p 14. This has led some commentators to see television as taking up the baton from British New Wave cinema. See Laing, op cit, p 139. Loach acknowledges the importance of the New Wave films but regards his own work as fundamentally different, in eschewing 'West End actors going up North' and having a long-term commitment, which the New Wave did not, to exploring working-class life. Loach interviewed at Tate Britain, 13 September 2004.
86. Fuller, op cit, p 15.
87. Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach: Art in the Service of the People* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), pp 26-31.
88. Potter interviewed by Paul Madden, op cit.
89. *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 November 1965.
90. *The Sun*, 4 November 1965.
91. *Daily Mail*, 6 November 1965.

92. BBC WAC T5/695/1: Newman to Wheldon, 15 June 1966.
93. *The Sun*, 4 November 1965.
94. *Daily Mail*, 6 November 1965.
95. Channel 4 press information for a repeat showing of *Cathy Come Home* on 31 March 1993.
96. *The Sun*, 17 November 1966.
97. *Daily Mail*, 17 November 1966.
98. Ibid.
99. *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 November 1966.
100. M. K. MacMurrough-Kavanagh argues that not only *Up the Junction* (abortion) and *Cathy Come Home* (homelessness) but other *Wednesday Plays* such as *Three Clear Sundays* (capital punishment), *Fable* (immigration/apartheid) and *Horror of Darkness* (homosexuality) were attempts to influence social legislation which departed from the BBC's notion of objectivity. "Drama" into "News": Strategies of Intervention in *The Wednesday Play*, *Screen*, vol 38 no 3 (Autumn 1997), pp 247-59. But she is wrong to say that the commitment to objectivity is included in the BBC Charter or is a legal obligation (see Chapter V).
101. BBC WAC T5/965/1: Savory to Michael Peacock, Controller BBC1, 30 November 1966.
102. BBC WAC R78/1919/1: O. J. Whitley, Chief Assistant to the Director-General, to Wheldon, 29 November 1966.
103. BBC WAC T5/965/1: Audience Research Report, 6 December 1966. The reaction index for the January repeat was 85.
104. *Birmingham Post*, 17 November 1966.
105. *Municipal and Public Services Journal*, 2 December 1966, p 3972.
106. Earlier in the year relations were so bad that Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, refused to be interviewed by the BBC after the general election (see Chapter V).
107. BBC WAC T5/965/1: Minutes of Controllers meeting, 29 November 1966.
108. Ibid, Garnett to Newman, 1 December 1966.

3. MOCKING CONVENTION: *THAT WAS THE WEEK THAT WAS*

Introduction

In terms of its impact, both at the time and in the longer term, *That Was the Week That Was*¹ was arguably the most important programme transmitted by the BBC during the 1960s. Its significance is twofold. It articulated a growing disenchantment, particularly among the young, about how British politics and society were being run and a determination to express this through humour and mockery. At the same time it mounted a direct challenge to BBC practice on the coverage of subjects such as politics and religion and what had hitherto been acceptable under the broad heading of decency. Much of the history of *TW3* can be told in terms of the tension between programme makers seeking the freedom to be irreverent and subversive and those in BBC management trying to hold the line on traditional principles.

Despite its subsequent reputation, *TW3* had a comparatively short life. The first season ran from November 1962 to April 1963. After a summer break the programme returned in September 1963, and was intended to run until the following April, but in November Hugh Greene, with the backing of the Board of Governors, decided to bring it to a premature end. There was 37 episodes in all. This section charts the origins and progress of *TW3* and analyses some of its key moments both in relation to the political and public controversy they provoked and the reaction of BBC management.

‘A late night programme with a satirical approach’

TW3 owed much to *Tonight*, which, as discussed in Chapter I, had helped to change the BBC’s reputation for being stuffy and paternalistic. Instead of talking down to the viewers it had sought to be on their side and, within limits, introduced a more sceptical and sometimes humorous approach to public figures and established institutions. *TW3* built on this and took it much further. It drew on *Tonight* in two other important respects. *Tonight* had challenged the BBC insistence of seamless television by showing banks of monitors and admitting technical breakdowns. *TW3* foregrounded the means of production even more explicitly, by having the cameras and sound boom in vision, making no attempt to disguise the back wall of the studio and showing the musicians, the audience and the backstage staff. This was partly expediency. It would have been

difficult in a fast-moving live show, with many changes of item, to keep everything hidden. Perhaps unwittingly, however, the programme was a good illustration of the Brechtian 'alienation effect', the process of destroying theatrical illusion and inviting the viewer to engage critically with the material.

From *Tonight*, too, *TW3* inherited key personnel, specifically Donald Baverstock, Alasdair Milne and Ned Sherrin. By this time Baverstock had left *Tonight* and had been promoted to Assistant Controller of Programmes. As editor of *Tonight* his subversive approach and volatile temperament often brought him into conflict with his superiors. Now, as part of BBC management with an overall responsibility for *TW3*, he had become the gatekeeper, supportive of the programme in the embryo stages but anxious as it developed to ensure that it did not depart too far from BBC standards. Milne had succeeded Baverstock as editor of *Tonight* and, as *TW3* became in effect an offshoot of *Tonight*, he was put in charge of it. This meant mediating between Baverstock and other managers on the one hand and the programme's main creative force, Sherrin, on the other. As a studio manager on *Tonight*, Sherrin had displayed touches of irreverence and *TW3* gave him the opportunity to build on this. Sherrin was *TW3*'s single most important figure. He devised the programme's tone and format, recruited the main performers, decided the content and directed each episode.

TW3 has been seen as part of the so-called satire movement of the early 1960s, the main components of which were the stage show *Beyond the Fringe*, the magazine *Private Eye* and The Establishment cabaret club.² *Beyond the Fringe* (first performed at the Edinburgh Festival in August 1960 before transferring to the London West End in May 1961) was the product of student revue at Oxford and Cambridge, though Jonathan Miller, one its quartet, had previously appeared on, and been sacked from, *Tonight*. Much of it was more parody than satire, nor was it particularly topical. An exception was Peter Cook's sketch lampooning a television broadcast by the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan. The Lord Chamberlain, who was responsible for censoring stage productions, waived the traditional ban on representations of living people.³ More topical, and less inhibited, *Private Eye* (which first appeared on 25 October 1961) was the creation of three young men who had been at Shrewsbury public school, Richard Ingrams, Christopher Booker and William Rushton. Cook, from *Beyond the Fringe*, became the magazine's owner, having already (5 October 1961)

started The Establishment in the Soho area of London. As a club it was outside the control of the Lord Chamberlain. It became the venue for new young comedians, such as John Bird, John Fortune and Eleanor Bron, though Miller and Dudley Moore from *Beyond the Fringe* also appeared, as did Cook himself.

Sherrin was alive to these developments and keen to draw on the talent. He wanted to bring in Bird, Fortune and Bron from The Establishment, and Bird was his original choice for *TW3*'s linkman. This did not happen, though Bird is credited with suggesting the name *That Was the Week That Was*. *Private Eye* did provide *TW3* with two of its key figures. Rushton, who served the magazine primarily as a cartoonist, became one of its resident performers, and Booker wrote many of the political sketches. But the influence of the satire strands on *TW3* should not be exaggerated. There was no direct crossover between *Beyond the Fringe* and *TW3* and Sherrin was planning a new Saturday night entertainment for the BBC long before *Private Eye* or The Establishment appeared. *TW3* may have become part of the 'satire movement' but *Tonight* was the main influence. *TW3* was less a tributary of *Beyond the Fringe*, *Private Eye* and The Establishment than a parallel flow.

It is difficult to establish the precise begetters of *TW3*, for which there are several claimants. According to Kenneth Adam, the Director of Television, 'the whole idea began with Hugh Carleton Greene, the Director-General, and myself. He was thinking of a show on the lines of the pre-war Berlin cabarets, I more of sophisticated revue of the kind they did at the Gate Theatre in the thirties. What we eventually got was something quite different, but at least the impetus came from the top'.⁴ If not claiming credit for 'the whole idea', Greene said he 'had a good deal to do with bringing *TW3* about. I had the feeling that something in the nature of political satire ... would be a good and healthy thing. I thought that politicians and other public figures often tended to be too pompous and self-important and it would be a good thing occasionally [for them] to be exposed to the healthy influence of laughter. I encouraged thinking in the BBC about this'.⁵

Milne, however, maintains that the idea began not with Adam and Greene but with himself and Baverstock who, having successfully established *Tonight*, 'had been talking almost nightly at Hampton, where we both lived, about the possibility of tackling a new programme venture for Saturday nights'. Sherrin also gives the credit to Milne

and Baverstock.⁶ They broached the concept with Sherrin, who arranged to go to America to check the late-night shows there. Sherrin was working on the project at least as early as mid-1961, when he wrote to Bill Foot, an Essex schoolmaster. Foot thanked him 'for your letter regarding the TV programme which you are thinking of starting in the autumn ... you seem to suggest it is going to explode a few "vices and follies of our time", puncture the pompous and be generally satirical.'⁷ Whether an autumn launch was ever feasible seems unlikely but in September 1961 Sherrin wrote to Michael Frayn hoping that he would be involved in a 'weekly late-night satirical programme'⁸. Similar letters were sent to other potential contributors including George Melly and Ralph Milliband of the London School of Economics. Sherrin acknowledged that Greene and Adam gave *TW3* 'their active support' but suggested this was much later, 'by the time we started recruiting for the pilot' (which was staged in July 1962). Milne agreed.⁹

There is another puzzling aspect of Greene's involvement with *TW3*. In 1961 the comedy writers Frank Muir and Denis Norden, who were acting as consultants to the Light Entertainment department, suggested bringing Mort Sahl, the American comedian known for his robust political humour, to Britain to appear on the BBC. Greene thought the show was mishandled and he decided that political satire should be done by Current Affairs (of which *Tonight* was a part) and not Light Entertainment.¹⁰ But by the time the Sahl show went out, on 19 July 1961, Sherrin was already working on the new Saturday night programme. The mystery deepens with a memorandum by Eric Maschwitz, Head of Light Entertainment, to Stuart Hood, the Controller of Television Programmes, in March 1962. Maschwitz was responding to a recent conversation in which Hood spoke about a possible 'late, late show' for Saturday nights. He asked Hood whether he wanted him 'to assemble a suggested format for this in discussion with some of the brighter brains?'¹¹ There is no reply from Hood in the files but it seems strange, with Sherrin so far advanced on his plans for *TW3*, that Hood should have given Maschwitz the impression that Light Entertainment might be involved. Indeed only a month before Sherrin had set out his proposals for what was then called *Saturday Night*. They were addressed to Milne, but with a copy to Hood.¹²

Sherrin's memorandum, which ran to eight pages and included a breakdown of

estimated costings, outlined proposals for 'a late night programme with a satirical approach'. It would be 'aware, pointed, irreverent, fundamentally serious, intelligently witty, outspoken in the proper sense of the word and provide an opportunity for saying things worth saying and not usually said on television'. There would be a studio audience: 'It is not necessary to try to recreate a phoney nightclub atmosphere but much of the humour will demand immediate audience response.' Although Sherrin envisaged satirical sketches and musical items, much of what he proposed, such as ad-libbed comedy, celebrity interviews, a discussion slot and filmed inserts did not find their way into *TW3*. The eventual format was still some way off. In June Hood approved a pilot, which was staged in 19 July. It ran for more than two hours and failed to impress Grace Wyndham Goldie, Head of Talks and Current Affairs, who found it 'amateurish in its endeavours to seem casual, and politically both tendentious and dangerous'.¹³ Sherrin, however, was determined to push ahead with a second pilot as soon as possible.

He was also firming up his team. He wanted to book David Frost, whom he had spotted in a London cabaret club, Lance Percival and Millicent Martin. All became stalwarts of *TW3*. Sherrin was even more determined to secure Bird, Fortune, Bron and Jeremy Geidt from *The Establishment* ¹⁴ but was rebuffed by Baverstock. Having seen the pilot for a second time, he concluded that the performers from *The Establishment*, because of the nature of their material, would not be suitable. He felt that they would be 'uncontrollable and would cause us more trouble than they are worth'.¹⁵ Goldie agreed. While Baverstock had been a prime mover in the concept of *TW3*, he was now a manager and the memorandum is an early indication of his determination to exercise management control. This became even stronger when, on Hood's instruction, he was made 'personally responsible' for the second pilot, working directly with Sherrin and concerning himself with all details of the production.¹⁶

The second pilot (29 September 1962) was more successful and, spurred by news that ITV, through Associated Rediffusion, was starting a rival show, the first broadcast of *That Was the Week That Was* was set for 24 November. A week before it went on air Baverstock set out his aspirations. He maintained that *TW3* did not spring from a desire to get in on the 'satirical vogue'. The word 'satire' would not appear in

the programme or be used in publicity. He suggested that the programme would counter what the American writer Mary McCarthy called 'the slow drip of cant' in serious television programmes. The language of *TW3* must be 'more vital, vivid and vigorous' and while the programme would not be entertainment in the usual sense it had to be enjoyable.¹⁷ All this was general rather than specific and the precise shape of *TW3* would not emerge until it went on air.

Series one: pushing out the boundaries

The first few programmes quickly established that *TW3* was breaking new television ground and challenging BBC practice. William Rushton playing Harold Macmillan may have been a minor thing in retrospect, but the BBC had not only been excessively wary about offending politicians but banned impersonations of leading political figures.¹⁸ Not only were public figures impersonated, they were pilloried and held up to ridicule. Early programmes attacked two prominent personalities in popular music. Norrie Paramor, the artists and recording manager at Columbia Records, was accused of putting his own, inferior, songs on the B sides of hits, this earning himself half the royalties. He was described as a slender talent, writing ordinary tunes with ordinary words.¹⁹ Paramor called in his solicitor, but the BBC's legal department had carefully vetted the script and Milne strongly defended the item. No more was heard. A few weeks later it was the turn of Lionel Bart, then at the height of his career as a popular composer. By playing a selection of Bart's songs side by side with those of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Jerome Kern and others, the item suggested that Bart was at best derivative and at worst a plagiarist.

More significantly, as politics had long been a sensitive area in the BBC, politicians were not spared, either. In January 1963 *TW3* highlighted 13 'silent' MPs who had not spoken in the House of Commons since the general election of October 1959. One of them, Sir Norman Hulbert, claimed in the House (thus, ironically, breaking his long silence) that this was a breach of privilege but the Speaker ruled against him.²⁰ The item was carefully researched by Gerald Kaufman, then a political journalist, and the BBC received no complaints. More contentious was an attack on Henry Brooke, the Home Secretary, on 23 March 1963. Written by Frost and Booker,

the sketch was cast as a parody of the BBC programme, *This Is Your Life*, with Frost taking the role of its compere, Eamonn Andrews. Brooke was castigated for a series of illiberal decisions, such as deporting a Jamaican woman who had stolen £2 and a Nigerian opposition leader who had applied for political asylum. He was also accused of incompetence for being unaware of the presence in Britain of George Lincoln Rockwell, the American Nazi leader, and Georges Bidault, the extreme right French politician. This was a selective, and therefore unbalanced critique, to which Brooke had no opportunity to reply.

Another regular feature of *TW3* had the journalist Bernard Levin confronting an individual or a group and treating them to a verbal assault. Not for nothing was this known within *TW3* as the 'invective' spot. The 'victims' did have the chance to reply, which was the BBC's rejoinder when the hotelier and caterer, Charles Forte, complained about his treatment. The BBC had also made it clear to Forte that he would be in for rough questioning. Even so, it was unprecedented for people to be harangued on television to this degree.

Apart from politics the controversial areas (according to Sherrin) were religion and the Royal Family. The most notable religious sketch was a 'Consumer Guide' written by two actors, Robert Gillespie and Charles Lewsen, and transmitted on 12 January 1963. Once again *TW3* used parody, subjecting Judaism, Islam, Christianity and other faiths to the same tests that consumer magazines such as *Which?* were applying to cars or washing machines, and ending with a 'best buy'. The targets were the churches as institutions, rather than religious faith as such, and much of the material was witty, even informative, rather than offensive. The most hostile comments were reserved for the 'religion' of communism. But as with so much on *TW3* nothing like it had been seen before and it was a far cry from the days (not that long before) when the BBC banned all jokes about religious denominations, even defining BC as 'before Crosby'.²¹ As will be discussed in Chapter IV, *TW3* let the Royal Family off lightly. There were few sketches on the subject and they were generally mild. One imagined the Queen's Christmas broadcast being rewritten by the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury (only four people phoned the BBC to complain) while another parodied the BBC's deferential Richard Dimbleby-style commentaries on royal occasions. That both drew complaints at all may be evidence more of extreme

sensitivity among diehard royalists than outrageous material, though the second sketch was dropped from a West End revue on the order of the Lord Chamberlain.²²

A final area where *TW3* caused offence, and one of special concern within the BBC, was what managers from Greene downwards called 'smut'. An early example was a sketch (8 December 1962) in which Millicent Martin tells Roy Kinnear that his fly buttons are undone, but the edition of 20 April 1963 provided most ammunition for the programme's critics, both within the BBC and outside. The banning of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* inspired John Albery, an Oxford don and one of *TW3*'s regular contributors, to find a paragraph in *Peter Pan* which, if read in a certain way, was full of sexual innuendo. There followed a sketch which imagined how romantic novelists, known for their coyness about sex, might tackle sport. Among a string of double entendres was a description of a woman golfer: 'In her clasped hands she held the instrument of her happiest hours, long, strong and true, her number one'.

At the end of *TW3*'s first season, Richard Crossman, the Labour MP and future Cabinet minister, gave his assessment. The programme had been described as the most corrosive anti-Tory propaganda since the Left Book Club in the 1930s. Crossman agreed, arguing that '*TW3* has probably done more damage politically than ten years of Labour Party propaganda'. But he identified a 'tremendous difference' between the two: 'The Left Book Club was not negative. It inspired a whole generation of young people, not only to hate fascism abroad and unemployment at home, but to care passionately and positively about Spain. *TW3*, on the other hand, had no positive ideas - and that is why it never rose above the level of a pleasurably shocking entertainment. A true satirist must mind desperately and David Frost and his gang never gave the impression that they minded even slightly ...'²³ *TW3*'s impact on politics is impossible to measure but if Crossman was right that the programme was anti-Conservative and helpful to Labour, it undermined the BBC's commitment to be politically impartial.

There were accusations of political bias. Howell Thomas, from Conservative Central Office, said it was hard to swallow a programme whose general line was 'so consistently left-wing, socialist and pacifist'.²⁴ But Macmillan told his Postmaster-General, Reginald Bevins, to lay off the programme: 'It is a good thing to be laughed at - it is better than to be ignored'.²⁵ Sir Edward Boyle, Minister of Education, praised

TW3, saying that ‘satire and radical irreverence are essential in a democracy’.²⁶ In April 1963 Greene reported ‘a reassuring comment’ from William Deedes, the Cabinet minister in charge of government information, and said that Reginald Maudling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was with him in the audience for a recent show and had been ‘favourably disposed’.²⁷ *TW3* was likely to be more critical of the Conservatives since they were in power throughout the programme’s run. Crossman was sure that a Labour government would be ‘guyed just as damagingly’.²⁸ There was no left-wing bias among the *TW3* team. Sherrin was a Conservative and Booker, who wrote many of the political sketches, came from a Liberal family. Kaufman was a future Labour MP but his ‘silent MPs’ included as many Labour members as Tories. The inclination to attack the Conservative governments of the period may have been generational rather than ideological. Sherrin was only 31 when *TW3* started and most of his team, headed by the 23-year-old Frost, even younger. To them politicians such as Macmillan and his successor, Alec Douglas-Home, seemed elderly and out of touch.

Crossman’s charge that *TW3* was essentially negative may have been true more of its political stance than its outlook on social matters. On race, for instance, the programme took a consistently liberal line. There was a sketch mocking the defence of apartheid in South Africa and a song, with words by the drama critic Herbert Kretzmer, which was performed in the style of the BBC’s *Black and White Minstrel Show* (yet another use of parody) to make a bitter attack on the lynching of blacks in the American South. It began:

I want to go back to Mississippi,
Where the scents of the blossoms
Kill the evenin’ breeze.

Where the Mississippi mud
Kinda mingles with the blood
Of the niggers
Who are hangin’
From the branches of the trees.

Homosexuality, yet to be decriminalised in Britain, was the subject of several sketches. One was prompted by the Vassall case, in which a homosexual Admiralty clerk was accused of selling secrets to the Soviet Union. Written by the playwright Peter Shaffer, it demonstrated how the most innocent phrases could take on a homosexual meaning. Another sketch, 'Confession', by the novelist John Braine, inverted the homosexual's furtive apology for his orientation: 'Heterosexuality is an ugly word. Until recently it skulked in the obscurity of the medical text books. Now, one hears it everywhere ...' *TW3* may not have been openly campaigning for a change in the law, but it was trying to counter McCarthy's 'slow drip of cant'.

Pushing out the boundaries of acceptability in so many ways, it was no surprise that *TW3* provoked a mixed and often vehement reaction from viewers and tested the tolerance of BBC management. The evidence of viewer reaction is fragmentary and difficult to interpret. What is clear is that the size of the audience exceeded all expectations for a show going out late (usually 10.50pm) on a Saturday. Adam thought it might get one million viewers. In the event the first episode drew 3.5 million and this figure more than doubled in the first six weeks. The peak of 12 million, or nearly a quarter of the population, was reached on 2 March 1963.²⁹ The sheer size of the audience can be taken as a broad endorsement for it is unlikely that people who disliked the programme would watch in such large numbers. In the early weeks the letters and telephone calls to the BBC (admittedly not a scientific sample) were broadly 2:1 in favour of the programme.³⁰ As people are generally moved more to complain than to praise, this proportion may be taken as evidence of considerable enthusiasm. One of the biggest postbags was received after the 12 January edition, which included the 'Consumer Guide to Religions'. Although 246 people were critical of the guide, 167 were in favour and, overall, appreciations outnumbered criticisms by 329 to 317.³¹ *TW3* may not have been offending its audience as much as some newspaper reports suggested.

In February 1963 the BBC carried out its own research into the *TW3* audience.³² It found a higher proportion (37% to 29%) of middle-class viewers than in the population as a whole and a slightly younger audience than the national average, 64% under 50 compared with 60%. More detailed research was carried out after the first

series ended in April 1963.³³ Respondents to a questionnaire were broken down into those who watched *TW3* regularly, occasionally or rarely. Regular viewers showed a very high appreciation with a reaction index of 83, while occasional viewers rated it 49 and those who rarely watched only 25. This disparity suggests that viewers either liked the programme a lot or were unenthusiastic or hostile. Although the research does not establish this, it may be assumed that the first category formed the vast majority. Asked to say why they liked the programme, the regular viewers put general reasons (the performers seemed to be enjoying themselves, it was informal, it gave a good laugh) over attacking pomposity or ridiculing politicians. Their main 'dislikes' were coarseness and jokes about religion, suggesting that in these respects they and the BBC management were not far apart.

Among regular viewers, again, there was wide support (91%) for Frost's compering. Although (apart from the cartoonist Timothy Birdsall, who died of leukaemia after the first series) Frost was the only one of the regular team who had not been to Oxbridge, then still associated with upper-class privilege, he came over as classless. His cheeky style, too, put him on the side of the viewer. On the other hand a large minority (34%) strongly disliked Levin's 'invective' (a view shared by BBC managers). Even enthusiasts for the programme could find Levin's savagery and rudeness hard to take. The most popular guest was Frankie Howerd, whose appearance on 6 April did much to revive a flagging career. Howerd, ironically, was a comedian of the pre-satire era, and his *TW3* material exploited this, though it was largely written by Johnny Speight who would have his own tussles with the BBC over *Till Death Us Do Part*.

The BBC was initially nervous about *TW3*. Two days before the first transmission Greene told the governors that it was a difficult project to realise successfully. It had to be regarded as an experiment and might need time to find its feet.³⁴ But after the first edition had gone out Greene said he wanted 'no delay in offering warmest congratulations to all those concerned'.³⁵ Soon, however, the BBC was forced on the defensive, drawing up a letter of guidance for answering complaints. It said that 'the programme is satirical in intention and while it has delighted many viewers by its debunking of the pompous, it will inevitably shock others by its

irreverence'. This irreverence was an integral part of satire but it was directed against persons and not against religion or deeply held beliefs.³⁶ Greene, though, was still on side. Early in January he declared that he had not laughed as much as he did on the previous Saturday and had found the note of geniality in the humour particularly pleasing.³⁷

The first statement of management disapproval came in a strongly-worded memorandum from Baverstock to Milne just after the edition which included the 'Consumer Guide to Religions'. That item he supported, but he reckoned that the programme as a whole had been the worst yet, with 'muddled standards and cheapjack values'. He told Milne to make it clear to Sherrin that he (Sherrin) must consult him (Milne) on all matters of programme content and accept that Milne's judgment was paramount. Baverstock had two specific complaints. One was about the use of 'swear words, blue jokes and obscene gestures'. The other was overrunning. As the last programme of the evening, *TW3* was often going beyond its allotted 50 minutes. Baverstock gave practical reasons for sticking to length, an Equity agreement which related fees to the billed running time of programmes and Post Office regulations on total hours of transmission. But he also made it clear that the programme would benefit from being shorter and tauter.³⁸ Arguments over these three points, editorial control, 'smut' and overrunning, were to recur throughout the subsequent history of *TW3*.

A week later, however, Adam gave Greene a more positive assessment, pointing to the large audience figures and wide support in the press and saying that while *TW3* must arouse fiercely subjective reactions it would be failing unless it did so. He suggested that much of the criticism of the 'Consumer Guide' had come from people who either had not watched it or not listened carefully to it. He repeated Baverstock's strictures against 'smut', which was not a substitute for wit, but praised the serious intentions of the programme team.³⁹ Unlike Baverstock and Adam, Greene thought the 'Consumer Guide' had gone too far, as he admitted to a senior church leader who had called it 'deplorably bad taste and gratuitously offensive to many viewers'⁴⁰. The Board of Governors, meanwhile, had shown no serious concern and when the first season ended they passed a resolution recording 'their congratulations to the television service on the introduction of an important programme in which the Board had taken a

continuing interest and which had had their support throughout'.⁴¹

Season two: management fights back

During the summer break, however, the old anxieties resurfaced. Greene told the Board of Management that those responsible for *TW3* had undertaken to the governors that 'smut' would be eliminated and greater care exercised over personal attacks. There would also be greater discipline on length, which would not normally exceed 50 minutes. The governors had been reassured and given their blessing to the start of the second series.⁴² But in August Adam reported that Sir Arthur fforde, the Chairman, was 'in a state of some anxiety'. Several of his 'powerful Establishment friends' were complaining about *An Englishman Abroad*, an August Bank Holiday programme featuring several of the *TW3* team, 'especially about vulgarity and smut'. He felt that Sherrin had not appreciated the undertakings given to the governors and told Hood he must see Sherrin and impress on him that these were not suggestions but 'instructions which have to be obeyed'.⁴³ Hood saw Sherrin and was 'impressed by Sherrin's new and fuller responsibility' for the programme.⁴⁴ In September Hood told a press conference that *TW3* was to be 50 minutes long and to ensure this there would be a programme after it. He was also determined to eliminate 'smut'.⁴⁵

When *TW3* returned on 28 September, therefore, it was having to tread carefully. Perhaps for this reason the first three editions were regarded as 'dull and lacking in new ideas'.⁴⁶ Audiences were down. They started at 9.3 million but by 9 November had fallen to 6.3 million, just over half the March peak.⁴⁷ ITV claimed that *TW3* had suffered from competition from its Saturday night programmes, such as *The Avengers* and *The Braden Beat*. Perhaps, too, the novelty was wearing off. Some of *TW3*'s old effrontery, this time directed at its BBC masters, did resurface over the decision to schedule a following programme. This was a repeat of *The Third Man*, a thriller series. To sabotage the strategy Frost gave away the plots. Greene was forced to admit defeat, conceding that the move had been 'much resented by the programme's personnel' whose morale had already suffered 'from the imposition of a sterner discipline'. *TW3* was to be restored to last programme.⁴⁸

On 19 October *TW3* shrugged off any notion that it had lost its nerve by running probably its most contentious item. Macmillan had resigned as Prime Minister and Lord Home had emerged as a surprise replacement. Written by Booker, the *TW3* item took the form of a letter to Home from Benjamin Disraeli. It portrayed Home as a pleasant man promoted beyond his capabilities. Whether over appeasement in the 1930s, or Suez in 1956, he had drifted with the tide and lacked many of the basic qualifications for political leadership, knowing little of economics or the complex needs of a technological age and nothing of the lives of ordinary people. The piece suggested that Home would end up as one of the 'tiny men' among Conservative leaders, such as Eden, Bonar Law and Neville Chamberlain. Just before the programme was transmitted, Booker, a 25-year-old writer, was surprised to get a call from no less than the Director-General. Greene, who had assumed editorial control of *TW3*, had read the script, considered it controversial and asked Booker whether the BBC should be putting it out. Booker replied that he thought it was important.⁴⁹ Sherrin insisted that the sketch was an attempt to treat Home's appointment not flippantly but in line 'with the the serious intention of the programme'.⁵⁰ But he felt its impact had been blunted by Frost's 'inelegant' delivery.⁵¹

Although the sketch drew a record number of complaints for *TW3*, with 599 telephone calls and 310 letters, it was only echoing what was being said elsewhere. The fact of Home's appointment (he was an unelected peer) and its nature (he was chosen by a process of secret consultation within the Conservative Party) had been widely criticised. His capability for the job had also been questioned, not least after he admitted, partly in jest, that he needed to use matches to help him understand economic problems.⁵² Some of the criticism came from within his own party. Enoch Powell (on the right) and Iain Macleod (on the left) refused to serve in Home's Cabinet and Macleod later claimed that Home owed his appointment to a 'magic circle' of fellow Etonians.⁵³ The *TW3* sketch, too, had been an attack on Home from a Tory viewpoint and could not be accused of party bias. But the BBC was not supposed to editorialise and criticism had to be balanced. The significance of the sketch lay not in what it said but that it was said on the BBC.

Frost thought that 'in retrospect the item was probably the death knell of

TW3'.⁵⁴ Whether that was so, two weeks later Greene decided that *TW3* must finish at the end of the year. It was such a sudden decision that the day after Greene relayed it to the governors, the BBC took up options on several of the leading *TW3* contributors, including Booker, Caryl Brahms and Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, 'until the end of the series on 18 April 1964'.⁵⁵ Booker and Brahms were paid up to April. A press statement said the decision to abort *TW3* 'has been taken for one reason only: 1964 will be general election year' and it was felt that the political content of the programme, 'which has been one of its principal and most successful constituents, will be clearly more and more difficult to maintain'.⁵⁶ This was greeted sceptically for, as Goldie pointed out, the BBC knew when the second series started that there must be a general election in 1964 so why plan to run it until April? ⁵⁷

Greene later revealed what may have been the real reasons. The immediate one was growing disquiet among the governors and the strong possibility that Sir James Duff, the Vice Chairman, would resign. The other was that 'undertakings about personal vilification and smut' given by the producer at the start of the second series had not been kept, though Greene was not apportioning blame.⁵⁸ Here, perhaps, was the crux of the matter. *TW3* may have annoyed the governors and BBC management with its personal attacks, smut and overrunning, but underlying this was the inability of managers to exert control. One of them was Goldie, who was belatedly drafted in to exert discipline over *TW3* and came to the conclusion that it was impossible. *TW3* became 'an endeavour to discover whether a group of creative people could work outside the normal framework of BBC editorial control and yet observe, of their own will, the obligations imposed upon broadcasting organisations by Parliament. The experiment failed'. Part of the problem, she suggested, was that mockery was indivisible. It was no good expecting the *TW3* team to refrain from some kinds of mockery and not others. To them such restrictions were 'incomprehensible and irrelevant. The problems of the BBC were not theirs. Theirs was a kind of private fun which they were sharing with a mass public'.⁵⁹

Goldie's argument is well illustrated by a conflict between Sherrin and Greene which went on throughout *TW3*'s history. Even before it first went on the air Sherrin had planned a 'tribute' to (which in *TW3* terms meant a savaging of) Lord Dilhorne,

formerly Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller, Attorney-General and then Lord Chancellor in Macmillan's government. In October 1962 a fee was agreed with John Albery for a five to seven-minute sketch.⁶⁰ But Greene got wind of the project and told the programme to keep off it, 'at least for some time'.⁶¹ Sherrin appears to have taken note for the next mention in the files is not until October 1963, just after the start of the second season. Sherrin was 'anxious to do Dilhorne this week' and asked the BBC lawyer whether there were sentences 'you would advise me not to use'.⁶² The lawyer sidestepped Sherrin's request and replied that 'DG [Greene] does not think it right to broadcast the Lord Dilhorne item'.⁶³ One the same day Adam told Milne: 'DG and I feel that we must drop this one once and for all ... we feel we must lay off these prolonged personal attacks unless there is great topical provocation ... Dilhorne is out.'⁶⁴

Sherrin, however, returned to the lawyer in combative mood. 'I did not want a ruling on whether to use the item. I would like you to let me know what remarks are actionable from a legal point of view as opposed to exceptionable from a policy point of view'.⁶⁵ This time the lawyer gave a legal answer: 'My own view of the so-called "Tribute to Lord Dilhorne" is that it is a fierce attack which might be held to be defamatory as a whole'.⁶⁶ But Sherrin would not be deterred. He decided to drop Albery's script and commission an alternative from Gerald Kaufman in which Dilhorne was compared unfavourably with another leading lawyer, Lord Devlin. It was broadcast on 14 December. The gist was that Devlin, widely regarded as the more outstanding lawyer, was retiring early to take the relatively minor job of chairman of the Press Council while Dilhorne had risen to be Lord Chancellor, one of the highest offices in the land. It suggested that Dilhorne owed his elevation in part through marrying, like Macmillan, into the influential Devonshire family. The parting shot was comparing Devlin, 'a brilliant and industrious lawyer' with Manningham-Buller, 'who in his own way, was wed to the law'.

Greene was furious and immediately wrote to Dilhorne: 'I considered several aspects of this item were most objectionable, particularly the reference to your wife. Those immediately concerned have been left in no doubt about my feelings on this matter. I hope you and your wife will accept my most sincere apologies for this

deplorable error'.⁶⁷ He also ordered an internal inquiry. Goldie stood by the item, arguing that while Milne had told Sherrin that the original piece was out, he had not said that nothing must ever be done about Dilhorne. Moreover, she knew nothing of any ruling to that effect and the cancelled item, apart from some quotations, was entirely different from the one transmitted. Although the script had come out 'harshly' against Dilhorne, it did not seem to her unfair. Goldie said she had been influenced in part by Greene telling her that since the programme was coming off we could 'let up a little in our attitude towards it'. She regarded the reference to Dilhorne's marriage into the 'Devonshire set' as a point about his public life, not a personal attack on his private life.⁶⁸ Adam, too, refused to condemn the item, saying it was largely based on quotations. He was satisfied that there was 'no resemblance between the Albery and Kaufman scripts and no intention on anyone's part to evade an earlier proscription or to 'slip something in'.⁶⁹ Writing 20 years later, Sherrin gave a different version. He had waited until 'everybody who knew of the BBC's unease about examining Dilhorne was away for the weekend' and 'deceitfully' submitted the script to Goldie without telling her of the Dilhorne ban. Either Sherrin had deceived Adam as well, or he was exaggerating his insubordination.⁷⁰

It may be that what irked Greene was not so much the attack on Dilhorne, which both Goldie and Adam defended, but that it had been made in spite of his attempts to stop it. Greene could not have been swayed by the reaction of viewers, because there was none. Indeed, the Board of Governors, while siding with Greene, decided against making a public apology since it would only draw attention to something which had attracted 'no particular public comment'.⁷¹

Conclusion

The Dilhorne episode encapsulated the challenge which *TW3* posed to traditional BBC practice. As in the Home/Disraeli sketch, the item was mainly repeating what had been said elsewhere. It was largely based on public comments about Dilhorne and Devlin, albeit carefully selected to make the point. But the BBC was not supposed to have an editorial view. Moreover, BBC producers were given a large degree of freedom on the understanding that any material likely to cause difficulty would be referred upwards.

While paying lip service to this, Sherrin tried to bypass it when he could. He was determined to broadcast the Dilhorne 'tribute' and having had his original sketch stopped, he brought in another writer with a different angle. In spirit, if not in the letter, this was against the known wishes of Greene. The episode helps to demonstrate why *TW3* caused so much trouble for the BBC and why, ultimately, it could not survive.

Although *TW3* came to a premature end, its influence was considerable. This was acknowledged by the person who had killed it. Looking back in 1968 over a decade of television, Greene singled out *TW3* as symbolic of a new attitude in the BBC: 'It proved that an intelligent programme of sharp humorous comment on current affairs could hold an audience of many millions. It was frank, close to life, analytical, impatient of taboos and often very funny.' He added: 'The vein opened up by *TW3* has been worked by many writers since then, in plays, some of our light entertainment and in some facets of the BBC's approach to current affairs. I doubt whether we should have had Alf Garnett without *TW3*.'⁷² *TW3* also ended for ever the BBC's traditional deference to political and other public figures. Although its successors, *Not So Much a Programme*, *More a Way of Life* and *BBC3* had less impact, there was no going back.

Notes

1. Hereafter referred to as *TW3*. The original abbreviation in BBC documents was *TWTWTW* but within a year this was condensed to *TW3*.
2. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines satire as 'the use of humour, irony, exaggeration or ridicule to expose and criticise people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics or other topical issues'. By this yardstick not everything in *TW3* was satire, but the label stuck.
3. Humphrey Carpenter, *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom of the 1960s* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000), p 100.
4. Kenneth Adam in George Campey, ed, *The BBC Book of That Was the Week That Was* (London: BBC, 1963), no page number.
5. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Oral History Transcript, Hugh Greene interviewed by Frank Gillard, 19 March 1977.
6. Alasdair Milne, *DG: The Memoirs of a British Broadcaster* (London: Hodder and

- Stoughton, 1988), p 31; Ned Sherrin, *A Small Thing - Like an Earthquake* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p 55.
7. BBC WAC T32/1647/1: Bill Foot to Sherrin, 29 June 1961.
 8. Ibid: Sherrin to Michael Frayn, 6 September 1961.
 9. Sherrin, op cit, p 61; Milne, op cit, p 33.
 10. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Greene Oral History Transcript, op cit. Bill Cotton, who produced the Sahl show, describes its troubled progress in *Double Bill: 80 years of Entertainment* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), pp 84-86.
 11. BBC WAC: T32/1649/1: Eric Maschwitz to Stuart Hood, 5 March 1962.
 12. Ibid: Sherrin to Milne, 7 February 1962.
 13. Grace Wyndham Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics 1936-76* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), p 222.
 14. BBC WAC T32/1649/1: Sherrin to Goldie, 19 July 1962.
 15. Ibid: Baverstock to Milne, 23 July 1963.
 16. Ibid: Hood to Goldie, 3 August 1962.
 17. BBC WAC T16/589: Baverstock to Hood, 15 November 1962.
 18. This was one of the instructions laid down in the *BBC Variety Programmes Policy Guide for Writers and Producers*, known as the Green Book. Although drawn up in 1948 it was still in use, unamended, in the late 1950s. In January 1963 the BBC announced that it was no longer being distributed, admitting that the latitude allowed to *TW3* had rendered it out of date. *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, 15 January 1963.
 19. Little of the footage of *TW3* has survived (the Paramor item is an exception) but the scripts are held at the BBC Written Archives Centre.
 20. *The Guardian*, 25 January 1963.
 21. This was one of the instructions in the Green Book (see note 18).
 22. *Daily Mail*, 14 March 1963.
 23. *The Guardian*, 10 May 1963. It may seem perverse to suggest that the Left Book Club, with 50,000 subscribers, had the same influence as a television programme watched by millions.
 24. BBC WAC T16/ 589: R. D. Pendlebury, Assistant to Head of Secretariat, to L. G. Thirkell, Head of Secretariat, 11 January 1963.

25. PRO TNA: PREM 11/3668: Prime Minister to Reginald Bevins, 10 December 1962.
26. *The Times*, 18 December 1962.
27. BBC WAC R1/30/1: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 25 April 1963.
28. Crossman, op cit.
29. BBC WAC T32/1649/2: Roland Fox, Assistant Head of Publicity, to Angus Wilson, 1 April 1963. Wilson was collecting material for an article on *TW3*.
30. BBC WAC T32/1649/1: Thirkell to M. G. Farquharson, BBC Secretary, 19 December 1962.
31. BBC WAC T32/1646/2: Thirkell to Harman Grisewood, Chief Assistant to the Director-General, 17 January 1963.
32. Ibid: Audience Research Report, *That Was the Week That Was*, 7 February 1963.
33. Ibid: Audience Research Report, *That Was the Week That Was*, 30 May 1963.
34. BBC WAC R1/30/1: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 22 November 1962.
35. BBC WAC T32/1649/1: Adam to Baverstock, 26 November 1962.
36. Ibid: Fox to Information Officers and Press Office, 14 December 1962.
37. BBC WAC T16/589: Adam to Hood, 7 January 1963.
38. Ibid: Baverstock to Milne, 14 January 1963.
39. BBC WAC T16/589: Adam to Greene, 21 January 1963. Adam was summarising a talk he gave to the BBC West Region Advisory Council.
40. Ibid: Greene to the Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, 15 January 1963.
41. Ibid: Adam to Hood, 30 April 1963.
42. Ibid: Board of Management minute, 8 July 1963.
43. Ibid: Adam to Hood, 13 August 1963.
44. Ibid: Adam to Greene, 22 August 1963.
45. See, for instance, *Daily Express*, 13 September 1963.
46. BBC WAC R1/31/2: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 10 October 1963.
47. BBC WAC R9/35/12: Audience Research: Listening and Viewing Barometer, 1 January-31 December 1963.
48. BBC WAC R1/31/2: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 10 October 1963.
49. Booker, *The Anti-Establishment Club*, BBC4, 7 December 2002.
50. BBC WAC T32/1649/2: Sherrin to Goldie, 25 October 1963.

51. Sherrin, op cit, p 78.
52. Home interviewed by Kenneth Harris, *The Observer*, 16 September 1962.
53. Iain Macleod, 'The Tory Leadership', *The Spectator*, 17 January 1964.
54. David Frost, *An Autobiography Part 1: From Congregations to Audiences* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p 100.
55. BBC WAC T32/1649/2: Heather Dean, Copyright Department, to Sherrin, 8 November 1963.
56. Ibid: Announcement to press agencies, 13 November 1963.
57. Goldie, op cit, pp 234-35.
58. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Green Oral History Transcript, op cit.
59. Goldie, op cit, pp 234-35.
60. BBC WAC T32/1649/1: E. Caffery, Assistant Head of Copyright, to Sherrin, 16 October 1962.
61. BBC WAC T16/589; Adam to Hood, 7 January 1963.
62. Ibid: Sherrin to R. J. Marshall, Assistant Solicitor, 1 October 1963.
63. Ibid: Marshall to Sherrin, 2 October 1963.
64. Ibid: Adam to Milne, 2 October 1963.
65. Ibid: Sherrin to Marshall, 3 October 1963.
66. Ibid; Marshall to Sherrin, 10 October 1963.
67. Ibid: Greene to the Lord Chancellor, 16 December 1963.
68. Ibid: Goldie to Hood, 16 December 1963.
69. Ibid: Adam to Greene, 17 December 1963.
70. Sherrin, op cit, p 72.
71. BBC WAC R1/31/2: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 19 December 1963.
72. Greene, 'The BBC Since 1958', *BBC Handbook 1969*, p 12.

4. RANTINGS OF A WORKING-CLASS BIGOT: *TILL DEATH US DO PART*

Introduction

Till Death Us Do Part was not the first situation comedy to present a working-class perspective on contentious social issues. *The Rag Trade* (1961-63) dealt with industrial relations at a time when strikes, particularly wildcat ones, were much in the news. But whereas *The Rag Trade*'s benign tone offended nobody, *Till Death* was abrasive and confrontational. Moreover, it spread its net wide, dealing primarily with attitudes to race and immigration but also covering the monarchy, politics, religion and morality. This section examines the origins of the programme and how a potentially difficult project negotiated its way through the BBC. Secondly, there is a discussion of the extent to which the extreme right-wing opinions voiced by the main character, Alf Garnett, were, as the writer Johnny Speight claimed, typical of a section of the British working class. Finally, there is an attempt to assess whether Speight's strategy of exposing bigotry by a holding a bigot up to ridicule backfired. Did audiences laugh *at* Alf, as Speight intended, or *with* him?

Speight and the making of a monster

Till Death was another programme initiated 'from below'. Speight was self-made, a product of the urban working class who managed to overcome the disadvantages of his background.¹ The son of a docker, he was born in Canning Town, East London, and grew up in a two up, two down, with an outside lavatory. He left school at 14 with little education and worked in local factories. Army service during the Second World War and enabled him to mix with different types and classes, but it was back to factory work afterwards. He tried to make a living playing drums in a jazz band and it was not until the early 1950s, when he was 32, that he started to write, having been inspired by reading Bernard Shaw in the public library.

He tried writing plays for the left-wing Unity Theatre, but disliked its idealisation of the working class. He switched to comedy after an army friend introduced him to Frankie Howerd. He cut his teeth in radio, which he found less snobbish than television, and wrote for Howerd, as well as other comedians such as Vic Oliver and Arthur Askey. But he soon moved into television and in 1957 started a long

collaboration with Arthur Haynes. Haynes's belligerent tramp character (created by Speight after a bizarre encounter with a real tramp, who got into his car and asked to be driven to Southend) had elements of Alf Garnett, and a sketch from a 1964 show, in which Haynes and Patricia Hayes played an East End couple resisting attempts by officialdom to rehouse them, can be seen as an early version of Alf and his wife, Else.² But too much should not be made of this. The Haynes series was a variety show built round a comedian, rather than a situation comedy played by actors, and while the Haynes character was on the political left, Alf was on the far right.

Although Speight continued to write for Haynes up to the comedian's death in 1966, he became increasingly frustrated with the show's rigid format and was looking to do what he regarded as the more serious work of writing plays. In 1960 he submitted a 30-minute piece, *The Compartment*, to the BBC, hoping that Peter Sellers would play the lead. The initial response was that it was 'an extremely slight vehicle for somebody of Sellers's stature' and a recommendation that they did not proceed.³ *The Compartment* was eventually produced, though with a young Michael Caine instead of Sellers. In April 1962 Speight's black comedy, *The Knacker's Yard*, was put on in London. A critic described it as 'arguably the nastiest comedy yet to have reached the stage in this country'⁴ and the BBC verdict was that 'because of its theme and the nature of most of its jokes it could never have been televised'.⁵

In 1963 Speight was invited to contribute three scripts to *Comedy Playhouse*, a series of situation comedy pilots. But only one was performed and Speight's priority was still elsewhere: 'Speight regards *Comedy Playhouse* as bread and butter but would like to break away and write a real play for us from time to time'.⁶ By now Speight had a contract with the BBC Drama Department for four scripts. But having commissioned *If There Weren't Any Blacks You'd Have to Invent Them*, a darkly comic attack on race prejudice which prefigured *Till Death Us Do Part* in its message if not its surreal style, the BBC decided not to produce it, while another Speight piece, *The Salesman*, was made but not transmitted. Having been frustrated in his ambitions as a playwright, Speight may have been happy to return to the 'bread and butter' of *Comedy Playhouse* when he was asked to contribute to a new series in 1965.

According to Speight, the invitation came from the comedy producer, Dennis

Main Wilson.⁷ Whether Main Wilson suggested a subject, or left it to Speight, is not clear. A memorandum from Frank Muir, who was in charge of comedy programmes, throws up a further mystery: 'Would you please commission Johnny Speight to write a *Comedy Playhouse* script, 25 minutes in length, concerning a young married couple living with their in-laws'.⁸ This was the 'situation' of *Till Death Us Do Part* except that the emphasis was reversed. The father, Alf, was the dominant figure and the young couple were subsidiary, and it is hard to believe that this was not Speight's original intention. Main Wilson did the casting. Peter Sellers was first choice for Alf but too busy in the cinema. The second choice, Leo McKern, was also unavailable, leaving the way open for Warren Mitchell, a little-known supporting actor. Gretchen Franklin was cast as Else with Una Stubbs and Anthony Booth as Rita and Mike, the daughter and son-in-law. Transmitted on 2 July 1965, the programme had an audience of 8.5 million (compared with 8 million watching ITV at the same time) while the reaction index of 67% was higher than for all but one of the previous seven shows in the *Comedy Playhouse* series. Two-thirds of those questioned found it 'human and realistic' and the dialogue, although crude at times, refreshingly natural. One respondent called it 'delightfully vulgar', another 'one of the funniest shows since *Steptoe and Son*'. A minority found the show distasteful, the language unnecessarily coarse and the working-class 'slanging-matches' unfunny. They also criticised the lack of a story.⁹

Barely a month after the pilot was transmitted, and before its audience research was published, the BBC decided to commission a series.¹⁰ On the attitude of Tom Sloan, who as Head of the Light Entertainment Group was a crucial figure, there are conflicting accounts. Sloan insisted that 'there was never any doubt about [*Till Death*] from the first script. It was raw, it was honest, it was brilliant in its characterisations and it was funny'.¹¹ Both Speight and Main Wilson, however, claimed that Sloan had disliked the pilot and Main Wilson recalled him saying: 'Over our corporate dead body do we make a series out of subversive muck like that.' But he was overruled by his superiors, particularly David Attenborough, Controller of BBC2, who said he would be happy to run *Till Death* on his channel.¹² Whatever the truth, neither Sloan's background, nor his managerial style, could have prepared him for such an iconoclastic show. The son of a Scottish Free Church Minister, he was public school educated and

served in the Royal Artillery during the Second World War. Unlike his predecessors, Eric Maschwitz and Ronald Waldman, who had both worked in the theatre, he had had no experience of entertainment when he became Waldman's deputy in 1954. Muir, who served under Sloan, described him as a 'good professional manager' rather than a creative force, keen on discipline, loyalty and Reithian values and strict on producers keeping within their budgets. His real interest 'lay not in the product but in the management of it'.¹³ For ideas he was prepared to rely on the people to whom he delegated responsibility. He was a traditionalist but also a pragmatist. He is said to have disliked *That Was the Week That Was*, partly because it had been made by the current affairs department and not his own.¹⁴ Sloan said his reservation was a lack of professionalism, displayed in tedious overruns and unfunny material. He found some of the show needlessly shocking, some plain silly, but thought much of what remained was 'brilliant, timely and superb'.¹⁵ He applied a similarly balanced judgment to *Till Death*, unhappy about specific aspects but overall defending it strongly.

The first series started on 6 June 1966 with two significant changes from the pilot. Speight had originally called his protagonist Alf Ramsey but as that was the name of the England football manager the surname became Garnett. In the cast Dandy Nichols replaced Gretchen Franklin, who was committed to a West End play. The show generated controversy from the start, with the Conservative Party asking to see a script of the first programme in which Edward Heath, its leader, was called 'a grammar school twit'.¹⁶ The accusation that far from ridiculing racism, the show was endorsing it, also came early. William Price, Labour MP for Rugby, protested to Hugh Greene about an episode in which a coloured doctor was described as a 'coon', 'sambo' and a 'nig-nog' and accused the BBC of promoting racial prejudice. Oliver Whitley, Greene's deputy, replied that Price had misunderstood the intention of the programme: 'Far from trying to get cheap laughs out of colour prejudice the programme sought to expose it in all its stupidity - indeed it could almost be described as a campaign against intolerance.'¹⁷

Another recurring criticism of *Till Death*, over its 'bad' language, brought a sharp exchange within the BBC. The critic Peter Black, though a supporter of the show, was dismayed by a word which he could not even bring himself to write, saying it had

been ‘used in the sense in which it does not mean an American dice game’.¹⁸ Lord Normanbrook, the Chairman, picked this up and asked Kenneth Adam, Director of Television, for an explanation.¹⁹ Adam replied that the producer [Main Wilson] decided that the word was justified in the context, despite a general instruction from Muir that it should be avoided. The decision was ‘clearly wrong’ and Main Wilson had been ‘admonished accordingly’. Normanbrook scribbled a note on the bottom of Adam’s memo: ‘I have shown this to DG [Greene]. The disregard of instructions from a superior ... is disquieting.’²⁰ Normanbrook’s ire might have surprised those who felt that *Till Death* had a licence to offend.

During the first series audiences rose from 5.7 million to 9 million, while the reaction index twice touched 70.²¹ A second series was commissioned with Sloan fighting its corner. Urging the BBC to increase Speight’s fee, he wrote: ‘I would remind all concerned that we are dealing with the most important comedy series since *Steptoe and Son*. If the series is lost, through negotiation on the lines suggested so far, responsibility certainly won’t be mine.’²² Main Wilson was less enamoured of Speight, complaining that his scripts had been late or non-existent and that he left much more to be done by the production office than the average comedy writer. Because of this they had had to cancel one recording and pay off the cast. With 13 shows planned instead of seven Main Wilson feared that they could be faced with playing gramophone records to fill the air time. He ‘could not see him [Speight] writing to the standard we expect in seven days per script’.²³ Main Wilson’s fears seem to have been justified, as only ten shows were made.

The second series, which ran from December 1966 to March 1967, drew huge audiences. The first show, transmitted on Boxing Day, was watched by nearly 20 million people and the average was around 17 million. Audience research revealed misgivings about the disrespectful treatment of royalty and religion, as well as the swearing and general vulgarity. But the majority found it thoroughly enjoyable and were delighted with the knocking down of hallowed institutions. Contrary to William Price MP, Alf Garnett was seen as ‘a typical ignorant and prejudiced loud mouth’.²⁴ Such comments were repeated throughout the series, as well as the observation that some of the material was unsuitable for children, who were likely to be watching at

7.30pm. An episode called 'Sex Before Marriage' proved particularly controversial. Mary Whitehouse sent to a telegram to Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, describing it as 'dirty, blasphemous and full of bad language'.²⁵ The BBC received around 400 letters, only 34 of which were complimentary. According to Speight and Main Wilson, Sloan, too, was appalled by the programme, telling Speight: 'You've let me down, it's disgusting, it's nasty, it's evil.' But at that moment Adam appeared, holding a congratulatory message from Greene, and told Sloan he was an old fuddy-duddy. ²⁶ Adam also defended an Easter Monday programme in response to a clergyman in Derbyshire, saying he had watched it with his family and found it 'a harmless evocation of a certain type of Bank Holiday fun'. He thought his was the majority view but conceded that the series divided the country.²⁷ Huw Wheldon, Controller of Television Programmes, gave a similar response to a headmaster who had been offended by another edition: 'I have been watching this series of *Till Death* myself and, to put it bluntly, I think it is marvellous. Let me equally say ... that the job of shows like *Till Death* is certainly not to offend or annoy but rather to delight and please'.²⁸

Despite this endorsement from the BBC's senior management, there were still anxieties as a third series was being planned. One was about continuing to schedule the show early in the evening when many children would be watching. Main Wilson set out the dilemma. Speight was entitled to mirror society as he saw it and would resolutely oppose any dilution of his intent. On the other hand the BBC did not want to lose its huge audience.²⁹ The show went out at 8.20pm, later but still before the watershed. A second concern was over Speight's reliability. Sloan wanted to commission eight shows, with the option for another five if Speight would meet the delivery dates. But 'Speight is not good at keeping to deadlines'.³⁰ By July the option had been dropped and the eight shows were eventually reduced to seven. A third problem was that Speight was pushing for an increase in fees. He had started at £600 per episode, later raised to £700. Sloan considered that £1,000 was the least he could be offered for the new series.³¹ A difficulty was that the government had introduced a pay restraint policy to which the BBC, in the national interest, felt it should adhere. But Speight stood firm, saying he could get £2,000 a show from ITV. ³² Michael Peacock, Controller of BBC1, weighed in, saying: 'I cannot emphasise strongly enough how unreasonable it would be

if we were to lose the services of this extremely valuable writer.’³³ Speight got his £1,000. Booth also put in for a rise, which he got after an impassioned plea from Speight that to drop the character would do irretrievable harm to the programme. For one thing, Warren Mitchell ‘cannot stand the sight of Tony Booth, either as a man or an actor, and finds this absolutely invaluable for reaching the emotional heights he does - Mitchell feels strongly that he could not give the same performance with another actor because he hates Booth so much’.³⁴

The third series, which did not start until January 1968 because Mitchell had film commitments, again proved very popular with audiences of between 16.5 and 19 million. But the old problems resurfaced. Michael Mills, who had succeeded Muir as Head of Comedy, complained that the continual repetition of ‘bloody’ weakened its impact and thought that 43 ‘bloodys’ in a 36-page script were too much.³⁵ Mills was even more concerned about the script for the final programme of the series. In the course of it Alf and Mike argue about whether man was created by God (Alf) or evolved from monkeys (Mike). When Alf says God is everywhere, ‘in Wapping, in this house’ Mike finishes his drink, turns up his glass, slams it on the table and says: ‘Got him!’ Mills insisted that this be removed, along with Mike’s remark that ‘God sounds worse than bloody Hitler’.³⁶ Speight contended that taking out the ‘God in the glass’ passage (which he borrowed from Aldous Huxley) would be a structural alteration which entitled him under his contract to withdraw the script. He relented when it was pointed out that this, and the reference to God and Hitler, could lead to the BBC being sued for blasphemy. Mills was left ruing that the loose definition of ‘structural’ enabled writers to exert undue pressure and said this was particularly dangerous with Speight who delivered so late.³⁷ Speight, as was his custom, went to the press complaining about his treatment. He claimed there was no censorship while Muir had been in charge ‘but since he has gone we have been irritated by a number of idiotic and unreasonable cuts’. The trouble had started since the arrival of Lord Hill as BBC Chairman and he (Speight) could be the victim of new policies. He would only write another series for the BBC if the censorship stopped.³⁸

But *Till Death* ended because Speight had run out of creative energy. Soon after the third series started Adam said it was likely to be the last ‘as Johnny Speight’s

inventiveness seemed to be drying up'. A similar process had happened with *Steptoe and Son* when Ray Galton and Alan Simpson had felt that the vein was worked out.³⁹ Soon afterwards Sloan reported: 'As we feared the worst has happened and Johnny Speight has dried up on the scripts .. with the result that we have had to abandon the seventh recording date. This means that we shall have done only seven programmes and not eight'. As Speight had failed to meet any of his deadlines 'I feel we have no obligation whatsoever to pay him for other than the scripts he has delivered, i.e. seven'.⁴⁰ Sloan's press statement about the ending of the series was blunt: 'Having devoted a lot of my time to defending Johnny Speight I have to say that if he is now talking in terms of savage censorship on the part of the BBC, this is absolute rubbish. If cuts were made to his scripts - and they were occasionally - they were made because in my opinion he went beyond the broad tolerance given to a writer of his talents. The last *Till Death* ... goes out tomorrow. I did not intend to ask Speight to write any more scripts because I had already come to the conclusion that the series was exhausted.'⁴¹

Form, ideology and reception

In creating *Till Death* Speight drew partly on the conventions of situation comedy and partly on first-hand experience. The family is a favourite site of situation comedy because it brings together characters who can have their conflicts and disagreements but ultimately stay together. Alf may call his wife a 'silly moo' (euphemism for cow) but he depends on her and, sterile as the marriage might be, she has no possibility of escape. The further conflict, generational as well as ideological, is between Alf and his son-in-law. In radio where situation comedy first developed, families tended to be likeable and decent, whether they were middle-class (as in *Life With the Lyons*) or working-class (the Huggetts). It took Frank Muir and Denis Norden, in *Take It From Here*, to devise the awful Glums as the antithesis of the cosy radio families of the 1950s.⁴² Speight acknowledged the Glums as 'a great influence' and said the vulgar, blustering, insensitive father (played by Jimmy Edwards) was in his mind both when writing for Haynes and devising Alf Garnett.⁴³

Having hit upon the family format for *Till Death* Speight gave it an authentic setting. Despite growing affluence, many young working-class couples were still forced

to live with their parents/in-laws, the four of them crowded into a small house. The set for *Till Death* was a room only 12ft square, which was claustrophobic and allowed no escape from Alf's tirades.⁴⁴ When the show moved out of the house it was less successful. For an Easter Monday special in 1967, entitled 'Till Closing Time Us Do Part' the Garnetts relocated to a pub (a real one was used) for a sing-song round the piano. Several viewers in the BBC's audience sample found it disappointing, feeling that even Alf had been swamped by the guest artists (who included Jimmy Tarbuck, Arthur Mullard and, as a foil for Alf's racist jibes, the black actor Kenny Lynch) and general noise and confusion. The reaction index of 61 was well down on the average of 68 for the preceding series.⁴⁵

As for drawing from life, Speight insisted that 'I didn't create Alf Garnett, society created him. All I did was to report him.'⁴⁶ Alf represented an insular, backward-looking and deferential English patriotism, which resented immigrants (particularly if they were black), lauded the aristocratic Churchill and Macmillan over the 'grammar school twits', Wilson and Heath, worshipped God and the Queen and stood for traditional morality. At first sight these views seemed associated more with the political right than the working class. Moreover they ran counter to two of the main thrusts of the 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s, the questioning of established institutions and a more liberal attitude towards moral and sexual behaviour.

On race and immigration, there was a graphic endorsement of Alf's views soon after the show came off the air. On 20 April 1968 Enoch Powell, the Conservative spokesman on defence, made a speech in Birmingham in which he envisaged a huge growth in the non-white population and warned of its consequences in lurid terms: 'As I look ahead I am filled with much foreboding. Like the Roman [a senator] I see the River Tiber foaming with much blood.' He called for the repatriation of black and other Commonwealth immigrants. The speech provoked strong reactions for and against, but what was striking was the support for Powell among the working class of the large cities. After Edward Heath, the Conservative leader, dismissed Powell from the Shadow Cabinet, 1,000 London dockers walked out in protest against Powell's 'victimisation' and marched from the East End to Westminster to lobby MPs. Another 600 dockers at St Katherine's Dock voted to hold a one-day strike. Significantly, perhaps, Alf Garnett

was a docker, as was Speight's father. Other groups to join the protest included Smithfield meat porters, factory workers in the West Midlands and immigration officers at Heathrow Airport who wrote to Powell saying they were tired of the corruption and deceit used to get immigrants into Britain.⁴⁷ A Gallup Poll at the end of April found that 74% agreed with what Powell had said, 69% said Heath had been wrong to sack him and 88% wanted stricter controls on immigration.⁴⁸ The findings were not broken down by class but as the sample was representative it is reasonable to imply a large measure of working-class support. Speight declared that if *Till Death* was on the air, Alf would be agreeing with every word Powell said.⁴⁹

In making Alf a fervent monarchist Speight may also have accurately represented a common working-class attitude. It might be thought that people towards the bottom of the social scale would resent the privileged lives of those at the top. Some did, but they were not the majority. 'You will find the greatest enthusiasm for the monarch in the meanest streets', wrote Clement Attlee, who represented East End constituencies throughout 33 years as a MP.⁵⁰ Criticism of the Queen in the late 1950s came not from the working-class but the upper-class Lord Altrincham and the upper middle-class Malcolm Muggeridge. Willie Hamilton, the Labour MP who persistently attacked the royal family for its 'ostentatious wealth and vulgarity' came from a middle-class background and went to grammar school and university.⁵¹ A poll conducted on behalf of Mass-Observation in the 1960s found that nearly 70% of the working classes, skilled and unskilled, were favourable towards the monarchy and 15% unfavourable. The comparable figures for the upper and middle classes combined were 79% and 7%, not a big difference. The same poll revealed substantial working-class support, between 44% and 50%, for the proposition that 'the Queen should be able to change what Parliament decides if she disagrees with it'. Alf would surely have agreed.⁵²

Whether working-class deference to the monarchy was carried over into its attitude towards politicians, as Alf Garnett suggested, is more problematic. Speight claimed that 'the only natural socialists are intellectuals. The working class are natural Tories and only vote Labour because their fathers did or because of the unions or because they are poor. As soon as they get a few bob, get a television, a house and a car they become Tories. It's why the Tories keep getting in - because the working class

votes for them, too'.⁵³ This 'embourgeoisement' of the working class was one of the reasons suggested for the Conservatives' election successes during the 1950s.⁵⁴ But Alf, who still lives in a cramped terrace house with an outside lavatory, is not one of the newly affluent. Moreover, his part of the East End remained solidly loyal to Labour throughout the years of Conservative rule. At the 1959 general election Labour took 77% of the vote in Poplar and nearly 71% in Stepney.⁵⁵ Another explanation of working-class Conservatism, deference to those in inherited positions of high status, fits Alf better.⁵⁶ All the same, his rants against Wilson and the Labour Party may have been less historically grounded than a device to fuel arguments with his socialist son-in-law.

While consistent with his reverence for the monarchy and well-bred politicians, the same might be said of Alf's dogmatic belief in God. Alf's background makes him an unlikely Bible-basher. The working class in Britain has been largely indifferent to religion.⁵⁷ The Church of England, to which Alf gives lip service, has failed to reach out to working-class areas.⁵⁸ But in pitting Alf, the believer, against Mike's atheism, Speight (himself an atheist) gave the series some of its more memorable jousts. Again, while there was a puritan streak in the older working class, expressed in Alf's opposition to sex before marriage, Speight may also have used this to get back at Whitehouse. Her attack on the programme was answered a few weeks later. Alf is reading with evident approval her book, *Cleaning Up TV*, and holding forth about 'the bloody filth on the BBC'. The book is eventually burnt by Mike to chants of 'unclean, unclean'.⁵⁹

Alf may have been speaking for a section of the British working class but, by showing him as bigoted, prejudiced and ignorant, Speight's aim was to hold his views up to ridicule. It was a bold but dangerous strategy as audiences might miss, or choose to miss, the irony. Far from condemning racism, as Speight intended, *Till Death* might promote it. There were, however, checks and balances. Alf tries to drown opposition by shouting it down but he does not go unchallenged. The other three characters function, to a greater or lesser extent, as a counterweight. Mike is the ideological antithesis of Alf and usually holds his ground. Rita, though less vocal, usually backs Mike. The character of Else operates differently. She has little to say but her interventions are

often deflating. One device used by Speight was getting Else to throw Alf off his stride by taking the conversation in another direction, as where Alf is pontificating about Lord Hill, then Chairman of the ITA: ⁶⁰

MIKE Well what about him?

ALF Who does he have to make his report to, eh?

ELSE Wasn't he the Radio Doctor? Oh, I liked him.

ALF The government, you hairy Nellie, that's who ...

ELSE He cured my lumbago once, he did

ALF Look ...

ELSE I wrote to him ...

ALF Look ...

ELSE An' told him how I had this lumbago.

ALF Look ...

ELSE An' he wrote back.

ALF Look ...

ELSE Very nice letter he wrote.

ALF Look ...

ELSE Told me what to do with it, he did

ALF Look ...

ELSE I think we was all a lot healthier when he was on the radio.

ALF Look!

ELSE What?

ALF I lost me thread now, you great pudden!

Another factor is that however outrageous Alf's views and behaviour, they are softened by humour. Writing of shows such as *Till Death*, Andy Medhurst observed: 'It is far from uncommon to laugh at a joke whose politics, if examined with care, would be reprehensible, but the skilled delivery of a joke can whisk us through the stage of ideological considerations to the pleasurable pay-off of the punchline. This is not said to excuse racist or sexist humour, but to argue that comedy does not achieve its effects through content alone.'⁶¹ Alf's diatribe about heart transplants, then being pioneered in South Africa, characteristically takes the racist line as he doubts whether a

white body will accept a black heart. But this tastelessness dissolves into a joke. Even if the heart does take, Alf wonders, what kind of life will the man have? 'Living in South Africa with apartheid ... I mean, he won't know what toilet to use for a start, will he?'⁶²

The possibility that *Till Death* might be backfiring by strengthening prejudice led the BBC to conduct its own research when the show returned in 1972.⁶³ The main conclusion was that the show had done little to change attitudes and its effect was more to reinforce existing views, both liberal and illiberal. The analysis of attitudes towards coloured immigrants suggested that at best *Till Death* was no more than a minor influence compared with, say, past experience of immigrants. Although a substantial minority (two out of five) regarded Alf Garnett's views as often reasonable, the great majority (five out of six) saw him as a harmless buffoon. General reactions to the programme appeared to reinforce the idea that humour transcended ideology, with 87% regarding it as entertaining, 76% funny and 68% harmless. The most common criticism of the show was its bad language, suggesting that the BBC's disapproval of 'crap' was a correct judgment of the public mood.

Conclusion

Till Death Us Do Part represented a radical departure in situation comedy, presenting contentious issues such as race and religion in a forthright manner. This brought criticism but the huge audiences suggested overwhelming public approval and the BBC, while cautious in areas such as bad language and potential blasphemy, was generally supportive. Despite Speight's protestations, the series was not killed by censorship. In creating Alf Garnett Speight highlighted an illiberal strain in the working class, which was confirmed by the reaction to Enoch Powell's speech. But it seems that viewers 'consumed' the programme as entertainment rather than ideology and while Speight's use of Alf to combat prejudice did not necessarily backfire, it is doubtful whether he changed minds in the other direction.

Notes

1. Biographical information on Speight is taken from his interview with Norman

Swallow for the BECTU History Project, 26 November 1990, and David Nathan,

- The Laughtermakers: A Quest for Comedy* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), pp. 124-28. Speight's autobiography, *It Stands to Reason* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), is more discursive and less useful.
2. The episode is held at the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford. The National Film and Television Archive, in 2004, had no viewing copies of *The Arthur Haynes Show*.
 3. BBC WAC T48/541/1: David Whitaker, Script Editor, Light Entertainment, to Helen Bell, 12 September 1960.
 4. John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p 275.
 5. BBC WAC T48/541/1: Michael Imison, Scriptwriter/Adaptor, to Betty Willingale, Drama Assistant, 17 January 1962.
 6. Ibid: John Elliott, Assistant Head, Script Department, to Sydney Newman, Head of Drama, 21 May 1963.
 7. BECTU History Project, op cit.
 8. BBC WAC T48/541/1: Frank Muir, Assistant Head of Light Entertainment Group (Comedy), to Script Editor, LE Group, 8 March 1965.
 9. BBC WAC R78/2811/1: Audience Research Report, *Till Death Us Do Part*, 19 August 1965.
 10. BBC WAC RCont [Radio Contributor] 18: Heather Dean, Copyright Department, to Beryl Vertue [Speight's agent], 17 August 1965.
 11. Tom Sloan, 'Television Light Entertainment', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, eighth series - 2, 11 December 1969, p.11.
 12. BECTU History Project: Dennis Main Wilson interviewed by Norman Swallow, 4 July 1991.
 13. Frank Muir, *A Kentish Lad* (London: Bantam Press, 1997), p 228.
 14. Paul Fox, quoted in Graham McCann, *Dad's Army: The Story of a Classic Television Show* (London: Fourth Estate, 2002), p 43.
 15. Sloan, op cit, pp 19-20.
 16. *Daily Telegraph*, 9 June 1966.
 17. *The Guardian*, 24 September 1966.
 18. *Daily Mail*, 22 June 1966.

19. BBC WAC R78/2811/1: Normanbrook to Adam, 22 June 1966.
20. Ibid: Adam to Normanbrook, 24 June 1966.
21. BBC WAC R9/37/2: Audience Research Viewing Barometer, 1 April 1966 to 31 March 1967.
22. BBC WAC T48/541/1: Sloan to Leslie Page, Assistant Controller of Television Administration, 14 October 1966.
23. Main Wilson to Frank Muir, 7 October 1966.
24. BBC WAC R78/2811/1: Audience Research Report, *Till Death Us Do Part*, 23 January 1967.
25. *Daily Sketch*, 3 January 1967.
26. Speight and Main Wilson, BECTU History Project, op cit.
27. BBC WAC T16/727: Adam to the Rev Derek Bailey, 3 April 1967.
28. Ibid: Wheldon to P. Grant, 3 March 1967.
29. BBC WAC T12/1321/1: Main Wilson to Sloan, 19 June 1967.
30. BBC WAC T12/1321/2: R. G. Walford, Head of Copyright. to Leslie Page, 13 April 1967.
31. Ibid. Walford to Page, 13 April 1967.
32. Ibid: Walford to Page, 20 April 1967.
33. Ibid: Peacock to Page, 21 April 1967.
34. BBC WAC T12/1321/1: Notes for Tom Sloan from Johnny Speight, undated.
35. BBC WAC T12/1321/1: Mills to Main Wilson, 24 November 1967.
36. The 'God in the glass' joke was included in the feature film, *Till Death Us Do Part*, released early in 1969, suggesting that the British Board of Film Censors (which gave the film an A certificate) was less concerned about blasphemy than the BBC. 'Crap' was also used.
37. BBC WAC RCont 18: Mills to Head of Copyright and Legal Adviser, 9 February 1968.
38. *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1968.
39. BBC WAC R87/2811/1: Board of Management, Minutes of Meeting 15 January 1968.
40. BBC WAC RCont 18: Sloan to R. G. Walford, 20 January 1968.
41. BBC WAC T12/1321/2: Statement by Sloan issued by the BBC Press Office, 15

- February 1968. *Till Death* eventually returned to the BBC in September 1972 and continued, on the BBC and ITV and under various titles, until 1990.
42. Nathan, *The Laughtermakers*, op cit, p 30.
 43. Ibid: p 137.
 44. Main Wilson, BECTU History Project, op cit.
 45. BBC WAC T12/1255/1: Audience Research Report, *Till Death Us Do Part*, 2 May 1967.
 46. Nathan, op cit, p 127.
 47. Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), pp 449-54, 462-65.
 48. Ibid, p 467.
 49. *The Observer*, 5 May 1968.
 50. 'The Role of the Monarchy', *Observer*, 23 August 1959.
 51. Hamilton obituary, *The Times*, 27 January 2000.
 52. Leonard M. Harris, *Long to Reign Over Us? The State of the Royal Family in the Sixties* (London: William Kimber, 1966), pp 144 and 46.
 53. BECTU History Project, op cit.
 54. David Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan, 1960), p 197.
 55. Ibid, p 219.
 56. Eric A. Nordlinger, *The Working Class Tories* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1967).
 57. This was first highlighted in the 1851 census, which bemoaned that secularism was the creed of masses of skilled and unskilled workers, as well as 'the miserable denizens of courts and crowded alleys'. J. R. H. Moonman, *A History of the Church in England* (3rd ed, London: A & C Black, 1973), p 357. Moonman comments: 'It is often said that the Church at some time lost the support of the working class, but the fact is that it never had it'.
 58. And still does. In 2003 the Rev Tim Stratford, a vicar on a Liverpool housing estate, declared that the Church of England was too middle class for inner city congregations and seen in poor urban parishes as part of an oppressive British Establishment. *Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 2003.

59. Transmitted on 28 February 1967.
60. Transmitted on 16 January 1967. Like most of the 25 episodes in the original run of *Till Death* this one has been 'lost' but the scripts are held by the BBC Written Archives Centre.
61. Andy Medhurst in Therese Daniels and Jane Gerson, eds, *The Colour Black: Black Images in British Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), p 16.
62. Transmitted on 12 January 1968.
63. BBC WAC R78/2811/2: '*Till Death Us Do Part* as Anti-Prejudice Propaganda'.
The research related to the series which ran from 13 September to 25 October 1972 and was based on replies to a detailed questionnaire completed by 772 people.

IV. ... PLUS C'EST LA MEME CHOSE

1. QUESTIONS OF COLOUR: *THE BLACK AND WHITE MINSTREL SHOW*

Introduction

So far this thesis has examined programmes which broke the mould of television and contributed in a wider sense to a 'cultural revolution' during the 1960s. But it can be argued that these were exceptions and that much of television went on as before, untouched by changing social attitudes. *The Black and White Minstrel Show* started in the late 1950s and did not end until 1978. Its long run and large audiences put it among the most successful variety shows produced by the BBC. Yet from the start it was condemned as offensive to black people. This section is in three parts. The first provides a cultural context for the show by tracing the origins and development of 'blackface' performance. The second traces the emergence of the show and examines, in particular by reference to its formal elements, the reasons for its popularity. Finally there is an assessment of the nature and strength of the criticism and why the BBC felt able to disregard it.

Black on white: the development of an entertainment tradition

The tradition of white performers blacking up started well before the American Revolution but gained momentum in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.¹ The first to gain an international reputation was T. D. Rice, the creator of 'Jim Crow', a comic impersonation he is said to have based on a deformed black stablehand. Rice started his blackface routine in 1828 and brought it to Britain eight years later. From a solo act the convention soon spread to troupes and the emergence in 1843 of the Virginia Minstrels has been taken as the start of the minstrel show. The most celebrated composer of minstrel songs (though he rarely visited the South and knew little of it) was Stephen Foster, who wrote for another early troupe, Christy's Minstrels, and is remembered for, among others, *Camptown Races*, *Beautiful Dreamer* and *My Old Kentucky Home*.

By the 1850s Christy had developed what became the classic three-part minstrel show format. In the first part the performers (all male) sat in a semi-circle with Mr

Interlocutor, the master of ceremonies, in the middle, and, at the ends, Mr Tambo (who played the tambourine) and Mr Bones (who clacked a set of bone castanets). The troupe as a whole performed songs and the 'end men' provided comedy. The second part, or olio, saw speciality acts in front of a drop curtain. One of these was the stump speech, a humorous address on a topical subject. Part three, the after piece, comprised sketches and burlesque and anticipated another popular theatrical form, vaudeville. Later a song and dance finale was added.

The original motive for blacking up seems to have been commercial rather than racial. White performers were impressed by the vitality of black song and dance and thought it was something they could copy. They were also looking to create a genuinely American popular entertainment, free from European influence, and saw black culture as an element in this. In these respects imitation was a form of flattery. But the depiction of blacks by white men in burnt cork was from the start a parody. The blacks in minstrel shows were portrayed as grinning simpletons, easy-going, lazy and naive. Make-up which imposed on the blacked-up face thick white lips and white-ringed eyes, and flamboyant costumes, enhanced the stereotype. American blacks in the nineteenth century were in no position to protest. On the contrary, they formed minstrel troupes of their own. Some black performers even blacked-up.

By the late nineteenth century American minstrelsy was in decline, a victim of rival forms of entertainment as much as growing racial sensitivity. One troupe which did survive into the 20th century, Lew Dockstader's, had among its members Al Jolson. Blackface might have seemed an odd career move for a Jewish immigrant from Russia but it helped to turn an ordinary performer into a dynamic one. Furthermore, Jolson appropriated the rhythms of jazz, the black person's music, to pep up his singing style. This can be seen as a homage to black culture as much as a theft from it.

The popularity of minstrel troupes lasted longer in Britain, where they became an entertainment appealing to all social classes. Although Britain had a very small black population and minstrelsy had travelled far from its American roots, it still had an ideological charge. For some it was an endorsement of white superiority as Britain built her worldwide empire, though men of social conscience equated slavery in the American South with wage slavery in Britain. Working-class audiences may have enjoyed the comic laziness of the minstrels as a subversion of Victorian values of hard

work and deferred pleasure.² Blackface solo performers found an outlet in the music hall. Foremost among these was Eugene Stratton, who was born in America of German parents but settled in England. His speciality was the ‘coon’ song, performed in blackface, of which he found a ready supplier in the Southport-born composer, Leslie Stuart, who attempted to evoke the American South in such numbers as *Little Dolly Daydream (the Pride of Idaho)* and *Lily of Laguna*. As Colin MacInnes pointed out, *Lily of Laguna*, an ‘apparently immortal English popular love lyric’, is about ‘the passion of a Negro for a Negress’.³

Stratton’s best-known successor was G. H. Elliott. Born in Rochdale, Elliott had gone to America as a small child with his theatrical parents and appeared with a leading troupe, the Primrose West Minstrels. Back in England he worked as a boy soprano and it was only after his voice broke and he became a baritone that he adopted blackface, calling himself the Chocolate Coloured Coon.⁴ That was around 1900 and he continued to perform, under the same title, until shortly before his death in 1962. He did so without apparently attracting adverse comment. During his appearances on *This Is Your Life* on television (13 May 1957) and *Desert Island Discs* on radio (24 November 1958), his blackface was barely mentioned. Rather, the emphasis was on the grace and polish of his performance.⁵ For MacInnes, however, ‘to see, as late as the 1950s, a blacked-up white pretending to be a coloured man, and singing a love song to his Lindy Lou (who was in fact G. H. Elliott’s plump and charming wife), was an amazingly archaic spectacle’. But he conceded that ‘the Chocolate Coloured Coon carried it off with the utmost dignity and aplomb’.⁶ In 1957 Elliott appeared in *The 1957 Television Minstrels*, precursor to *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, and according to BBC audience research was the most popular performer.⁷

The minstrel show, meanwhile, continued to demonstrate its adaptability. Having faded from the stage, it was taken up by radio. *The Kentucky Minstrels* started in 1933 and ran until 1950. Underpinning the show were two modes, the nostalgic and the comic, the former harking back to an idealised and sanitised view of plantation life which ignored the harsh realities of slavery. The visual impact of blackface was lost in radio and Michael Pickering suggests that in any case ‘the racist connections of minstrelsy had lost much of their old force and venom’. He attributes this in part to the

presence of three African-Americans in the regular cast of five: Ike Hatch, a singer who played Tambo, and the comedy double act of Harry Scott and Eddie Whaley.⁸ The two regular white performers were the actor (there were several) who played Mr Interlocutor, the compere, and C. Denier Warren, an American who wrote the scripts, delivered the stump speech and played Bones.

Blackface moves to television

The Black and White Minstrel Show was a further reworking of minstrelsy for television. Two figures form a link with *The Kentucky Minstrels*. Eric Maschwitz had been head of the radio Variety Department in the 1930s and while not in at the birth of *The Kentucky Minstrels* had found its nostalgic tone congenial. In 1958, after a period away from the BBC, he returned as Head of Television Light Entertainment. George Inns, who joined the BBC as a 14-year-old messenger boy in the 1920s, had worked on *The Kentucky Minstrels* before becoming a radio producer in his own right, launching comedy series such as *Up the Pole* and *Ray's a Laugh*. Other radio forerunners of *The Black and White Minstrel Show* were shows featuring minstrel songs produced by Charles Chilton, such as *Cabin in the Cotton* (1947) and *Gentlemen Be Seated* (1950). Chilton used a group of singers formed by a former accountant, George Mitchell. During the 1950s the George Mitchell Singers moved into television.

Inns did likewise and in September 1957 he produced a minstrel show which was televised from the National Radio Show at Earl's Court. *The 1957 Television Minstrels* featured the Mitchell Minstrels, men in blackface, the Television Toppers, a female dance group which did not black up, and solo artists including Elliott, Hatch and Kenneth Connor. Hatch and Connor (a white comedian in blackface) appeared as a double act called The Two Black Looks, perhaps echoing Scott and Whaley. In addition to Hatch there were four other black singers. The audience was estimated at 6.8 million, considerably better than a Terry Scott series which had occupied the same Monday evening slot, while a reaction index of 65 was close to the light entertainment average for that quarter. The majority verdict was that the show was pleasantly enjoyable but not outstanding in any way. Some viewers complained that there was not enough material in the minstrel show tradition.⁹

Perhaps because of this tepid response the minstrel idea was not taken up until

the following June when the first *Black and White Minstrel Show* proper was transmitted. In the meantime Maschwitz had taken charge of light entertainment and was looking to fill a Saturday evening slot. Inns, one of his producers, suggested the minstrel show. The audience was slightly lower than usual for Saturday light entertainment, but the reaction index of 76 compared well with the average of 68. The main appeal, according to audience research, was the old songs, particularly the 'nigger minstrel' (sic) songs and the 'tuneful and nostalgic' twenties numbers. The comedy interludes were also enjoyed and there was praise, too, for the show's 'very slick pace'. A minority were unhappy about the mixture of 'black' and 'white' and, remembering the radio *Kentucky Minstrels*, had been expecting a more traditional minstrel show.¹⁰

Inns would have appreciated the comments about pace. He wanted the show to move so quickly that viewers would not have a chance to switch off. Central to this were the song-and-dance routines, with comedy and speciality acts (such as a ventriloquist or George Chisholm's jazz spot) providing contrast and allowing for costume and scene changes of which there were half a dozen in each show. There were sequences of seven or eight songs with a common theme such as a performer or a composer or a Spanish or Irish flavour. The bulk of the songs harked back to the 1930s and before and they were rattled off at such a rate that there were up to 50 in a 45-minute show. Dennis Potter (in a grudgingly favourable review) likened the effect to 'a melodic kaleidoscope given a quick shake every time it threatened to settle'.¹¹ Although the songs of Foster, and the Jolson repertoire, were regularly featured, minstrel or blackface numbers were never more than a small part of the show. Because the medleys were given a standardised 'singalong' treatment, the songs tended to lose their individuality and original context, and it was the grinning blacked-up faces, not the numbers, that provoked the complaints.

As some viewers noted, Inns departed significantly from the traditional minstrel show. Even compared with *The Kentucky Minstrels* many of the elements had gone. There was no Mr Interlocutor, no Tambo and Bones, no three-part structure, no stump speech. It could be said that only the finale remained, indeed that Inns's format was a series of finales. Compared with the 1957 'pilot', there were no black artists. Furthermore, while the minstrel show had been a male preserve, Inns brought in the Television Toppers 'to add glamour', as well as female singers. He chose the title precisely

because there were white performers as well as black.¹² The mixture of black and white also gave a strong visual contrast while the Toppers were alternately blonde and brunette. As well as drawing on minstrel elements, Inns was also influenced by the song-and-dance stage spectacles mounted by George Edwardes in Britain and Ziegfeld in America.¹³

Even after the positive reception for the first *Black and White Minstrel Show* the BBC seemed slow to see its potential. Although Kenneth Adam, the Controller of Television Programmes, complained that ‘the size of audience for Saturday light entertainment shows makes melancholy reading’ and declared that ‘the Saturday night habit of watching BBC has gone’¹⁴ from June 1958 to April 1959 there were only seven editions of *The Black and White Minstrel Show*. The first regular series did not start until September 1959 but from then on it became a Saturday peaktime fixture, going out fortnightly over several months. By the third series (January to May 1961) it was attracting audiences of close to 16 million and achieving an ‘unprecedentedly high’ reaction index of between 84 and 88. Both figures were well above those for the BBC’s other main variety programme, *The Billy Cotton Band Show*.¹⁵

These audience and reaction index figures were quoted by Eric Maschwitz in an internal memorandum in which he singled out *The Black and White Minstrel Show* for special praise, describing it as ‘a 45-minute parade of familiar melodies to which its producer [Inns] brings almost every trick of visual presentation of which television is capable. Crowding melody upon melody, image upon image, he has created a peak-hour programme of the widest possible appeal. Here is “easy listening” par excellence: appreciation of the music demands no effort from the audience while the screen-filling series of images are a delight to the eye ...’¹⁶

Not only did *The Black and White Minstrel Show* help the BBC to fend off competition from ITV on Saturday evenings, but it achieved notable success elsewhere. The edition of 25 March 1961 was entered for the first international television competition, held at Montreux in Switzerland. Against competition from 33 entries from 19 countries, including American shows featuring Fred Astaire and Perry Como, it won the top Golden Rose trophy.¹⁷ Meanwhile the show had returned minstrelsy to the theatre. The first stage version was put on at Scarborough in 1960 and in May

1962, filling the gap left by the retirement of the Crazy Gang, it opened at the Victoria Palace in London where it ran, with one break, for ten years.

The wide appeal of the show became one of the main BBC defences against charges of demeaning black people. The British Caribbean population was growing quickly but still small overall. One calculation puts it as 28,000 in 1951, 209,000 in 1961 and 402,000 in 1965. The total population in 1966 was more than 51 million.¹⁸ Although the show was criticised from the start, the attacks tended to be scattered and to come from white liberals rather than the black community. Writing of *The 1957 Television Minstrels*, Tony Brown called the nigger minstrel concept an offence to the Negro race, depicting the African as a shambling, subhuman specimen who was more ridiculous because his skin was dark. He went on: 'The white lips worn by the minstrel serve to depict a large mouth of grinning teeth. Part of the "humour" is the stumbling attempts of the unschooled American Negro to use long words'. Brown quoted a joke from the show: 'Shine up ma face, boy, so's ah can see ma boots in it.' He also cited a line from one of the songs: 'It's the same old tale of the palpitating nigger ...' Brown said it did not diminish the offence to claim that none was intended and he was particularly critical of the black performers, who debased themselves by lending their names to the show.¹⁹ Brown drew an approving response from O. A. Roberts, a black ex-serviceman, who wrote that it was no joke for the Negro to be asked about his mud hut, the number of white men he ate or the length of his tail.²⁰

In 1959 the critic Ivor Brown declared that the show should 'abandon its ebony pretences' and said he saw 'no point in white singers putting on a grotesque make-up, which has nothing to do with the natural good looks of an African, in order to sing popular songs which have nothing to do with the coloured world'.²¹ In 1961 Humphrey Lyttelton, the jazz musician, acknowledged that the traditional contents of the nigger minstrel show had been watered down but said enough remained to make *The Black and White Minstrels* highly offensive to a great many people. In a world where people were being abused and denied basic rights because of the colour of their skins, 'the golliwog antics of *The Black and White Minstrels* strike a note which is anything but nostalgic'.²² Two leading television critics, Peter Black and Philip Purser, were also hostile, though they regarded blackface as silly as much as offensive.²³

Those closely connected with the show sprang to its defence. Mitchell said that 'of all the thousands of letters I get about the programme there has not been one against us. Coloured chaps have congratulated me on the production ... some have wanted to join us'. Inns said he had had half a dozen critical letters but even these had praised the production.²⁴ Maschwitz declared that in close on 40 years in showbusiness he had never run across prejudice against blacking up.²⁵ Tony Mercer, one of the lead singers, said: 'Many of my friends are coloured people who have seen the show [on stage at Scarborough] and they tell me the thought never crossed their minds that it is offensive or suggests racial discrimination'.²⁶

One of the strongest attacks came from within the BBC, though it was not made public. Its instigator was Barrie Thorne, the corporation's Chief Accountant, in a memorandum to Kenneth Adam, now Director of Television, with a copy to Hugh Greene. Saying he was a supporter of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (the American body formed to combat racism), he wrote: 'The Uncle Tom attitude of the show in this day and age is a disgrace and an insult to coloured people everywhere. If black faces are to be shown, for heaven's sake let coloured artists be employed and with dignity.'²⁷ Adam replied by registering his 'total disagreement'. While he yielded to no one in detesting apartheid and the treatment of blacks in the American South, to suggest that 'a perfectly honorable theatrical tradition of the British music hall' was an insult to coloured people was 'arrant nonsense'. Moreover, he had found his coloured friends less sensitive than their well-meaning white friends.²⁸

In 1967 the black voice finally made itself heard. Some 200 people, mainly black and living in London, signed a petition to the BBC asking it to take the show off: 'This hideous impersonation is quite offensive and causes much distress to most coloured people. Moreover, it creates serious misunderstanding between the races.' The protest was organised by Clive West, a 32-year-old Trinidadian living in London, and he was supported by the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD).²⁹ The petition was widely reported and the BBC was forced to reply. Its statement said it had a strict attitude about the presentation of racialism and 'we do not think that *The Black and White Minstrel Show* is in any way offensive. It is a traditional show enjoyed by millions for what it offers in good-hearted family entertainment'.³⁰ Kenneth Lamb, the

BBC Secretary, wrote on Greene's behalf to Dr David Pitt, Chairman of CARD, in similar terms. He cited the show's popularity and said the ordinary viewer 'accepts what he sees as what it is - a fast-moving traditional song-and-dance show simply making use of a theatrical convention which television has adopted', adding that 'the blacked-up faces of the men produce an anonymity which is in pleasing contrast to the individual features of the girls'.³¹ Greene called it an 'admirable letter' and considered that no further action was necessary.³²

Privately BBC management was less emollient. Thorne, still Chief Accountant, returned to the offensive in a memorandum to Oliver Whitley, Greene's Chief Assistant. Dismissing the BBC's argument that the show was enjoyed by millions as good-hearted family entertainment he wrote: 'Many regard the show as Uncle Tom from start to finish and as such is underlyingly offensive to many, no matter what the outward gloss and size of the audience prove to the contrary.'³³ Whitley replied in forthright terms: 'It seems to be absurd to imagine that people who are not already racially prejudiced could possibly be in some way contaminated by the Minstrels. People who are already racially prejudiced are more likely to be exacerbated by the protest itself than the object of the protest. The best advice that could be given to coloured people by their friends would be: "On *this* issue, we can see your point, but in your own best interests, for Heaven's sake shut up. You are wasting valuable ammunition on a comparatively insignificant target.'"³⁴ Perhaps it was as well for the BBC that these remarks did not become public until the relevant file at the BBC Written Archives Centre was opened in 2004.

Adam doubted whether 200 signatures from one area of the country represented a significant body of opinion ³⁵ and the BBC was fortified by press reaction to the petition, which largely supported its stance. In a leader headed 'The Wrong Target' *The Times* said it was unlikely that more than a handful of the regular 14,500,000 viewers considered the programme had racial undertones. Although using more measured language, the paper endorsed Whitley's view that coloured people were faced with more serious problems, such as discrimination in employment, housing and services. It concluded: 'It would be a pity if public debate was diverted into what is essentially a side issue and much needed good will lost.'³⁶ In a letter to the paper Pitt

agreed that equal opportunity was the main issue but added that 'human dignity is important - even as a side issue'.³⁷ Perhaps with tongue slightly in cheek the critic Milton Shulman argued that it was 'the only programme that regularly shows coloured men - even in black make-up - cuddling, cooing, loving and courting white girls'. The girls, by their smiles and wiggles and nods, were clearly enjoying it. Shulman concluded: 'I have always thought that this was a programme that white racists might complain about. But never Negroes.'³⁸ Support also came from a prominent black source. Lady Constantine, wife of Sir Learie, the former West Indian cricketer, said: "My husband and I watch the programme every time it is on. We just take it as a show and have no objection to it at all. In fact we rather enjoy it. You might say we were fans.'³⁹

The Constantines were not the only West Indians to endorse the minstrels. Surprisingly, perhaps, the BBC had sold the programme to Caribbean countries, where it was well received. Elizabeth Duben, a British singer who had recently finished a six-week tour of the region, wrote to Maschwitz's successor, Tom Sloan: 'I thought (in view of the recent controversy) you'd be interested to know that one show which is watched with absorbed attention and great enjoyment by the local people - is *The Black and White Minstrels!*'⁴⁰ Sloan thought the letter significant enough to send a copy to Kenneth Lamb, who called it 'a most useful addition to the file'.⁴¹ Even readers of the left-wing weekly, *Tribune*, as Adam was pleased to note, came to the show's defence when it was savaged by the paper's literary editor, Elizabeth Thomas.⁴² The edition she wrote about had (unusually) included black artists, which she found particularly offensive. Whitley, too, deplored this, though from a different angle, arguing that the inclusion of two real Negroes had broken the convention of the 'coloured coon' and might undermine the grounds on which the BBC had rebutted the petition. Adam said it had been a mistake and would not happen again.⁴³ In December 1967 *The Black and White Minstrel Show* became one of the first BBC programmes to be shown in colour, which helped to give it a new lease of life.

The only sign that the BBC might be having second thoughts was a programme called *Masquerade* (transmitted in November 1968), which had all the *Black and White Minstrel Show* ingredients except that the men appeared in masks instead of blackface.

The experiment drew a lukewarm response from viewers and critics and was not repeated. The show proper continued, with a regular annual series and Christmas specials, until 1978. Some mystery surrounds the ending of the programme. There was no announcement, even to the cast which had been expecting new contracts. Michael Pickering states that 'the BBC finally axed the programme in response to a heightened sense of awareness of its racial associations'⁴⁵ but there is no evidence for this and there could have been other reasons. One was that the show was getting expensive to produce at a time when the BBC was being hit by inflation. The Toppers were reduced from 12 to ten and the costume designer complained that it was impossible to work within the current budget.⁴⁶ Another was falling audiences. By the final series they had dropped below 7 million, or less than half what they had been, though the reaction index was still high at between 76 and 78.⁴⁷ The first public admission from the BBC that the show was no longer acceptable did not come until 1986 when it was pointedly omitted from a celebration of 50 years of television. The corporation conceded that it had become regarded as 'racist and patronising'.⁴⁸

Why the BBC stood firm

It remains to consider why the BBC felt able to resist criticism of *The Black and White Minstrel Show* so vigorously and for so long. The cynical answer is that it could not afford to drop one of its biggest audience-pullers, central to winning the Saturday evening ratings battle with ITV. It could also argue that the very size of the audience, and exceptionally high appreciation index, meant that any offence the show might be giving must be very small. Moreover, the protests tended to come from white liberals rather than blacks and the 1967 petition was signed by only 200 people from one part of the country.

Black consciousness in Britain had not reached the level it had attained in the United States, which saw a nationwide campaign for civil rights and the emergence of charismatic black leaders such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. In November 1968 *The Black and White Minstrel Show* appeared in the Royal Variety Performance with the black American singing group, the Supremes. Having watched the Minstrels rehearse, Diana Ross, the group's most vociferous member, threatened to pull out and

only agreed to go ahead after it was suggested that this would be seen as an insult to the Royal Family. But Ross interrupted their last number to mount an emotional plea for racial equality. Facing the the Royal Box she said: 'Let our efforts be as determined as Martin Luther King who had a dream that all God's children - black men, white men, Jews, Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics - could join hands and sing the great spiritual of old, "Free at Last!"'.⁴⁴

Such a protest could not have come from a black Briton. David Pitt was one of the few black leaders of any weight. A doctor from Grenada, he was elected to the London County Council and became one of the country's first black magistrates. But he was little known outside London and when, in 1970, he stood for Parliament in a winnable Labour seat he was defeated. It seemed that Britain was not yet ready to accept a black MP. Moreover, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, of which he was the first (and only) chairman, illustrates the difficulty of establishing a black voice during the 1960s. Formed at the instigation of Martin Luther King after a visit to Britain, CARD was only one of half a dozen organisations speaking for black and other ethnic minorities. Furthermore, 'it had no roots in any community and rapidly collapsed without achieving any of its aims'.⁴⁹

Part of the reason why black people were not more vocal about *The Black and White Minstrel Show* was, as *The Times* suggested (and Pitt agreed), that trying to combat discrimination in jobs, housing and services was a greater preoccupation. Learie Constantine's reported enthusiasm for the show has been noted. He was a member of the BBC's General Advisory Council in the 1960s and from 1969 sat on the Board of Governors, but there is no record in the minutes of either body of his having raised doubts about the programme. He was not blind to racism. During the Second World War, with his wife and daughter, he was turned away from a London hotel which 'did not want niggers'. He pursued the matter to court and won.⁵⁰ Compared with this, a minstrel show may have seemed innocuous. Anecdotal evidence also suggests a difference between generations, with older black people being more acquiescent. The comedian Lenny Henry appeared on *The Black and White Minstrel Show* as a 17-year-old in 1975 and found it demeaning, but said that people including his mother watched the show for the songs and costumes and did not question the blacking-up.⁵¹ The

writer Stephen Bourne recalled his Guyanese aunt going to see G. H. Elliott. Did she find him offensive? ‘No boy, he was great’.⁵²

Conclusion

During the 1960s BBC programmes such as *That Was the Week That Was*, *The Wednesday Play* and *Till Death Us Do Part* pushed out boundaries and challenged conventional attitudes. With *The Black and White Minstrel Show* the BBC did not try to lead public opinion but went along with what it judged to be the prevailing mood. It was alert to charges of racism and Greene himself said this was one subject on which the corporation would not be neutral. But sensitivity about the representation of black people on television, particularly among blacks themselves, was not yet strong enough to force the BBC to abandon one of its most popular shows.

Notes

1. An authoritative study is Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
2. Michael Pickering, ‘White Skin, Black Masks: “Nigger Minstrelsy” in Victorian England’, in J. S. Bratton, ed, *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), pp 70-91.
3. Colin MacInnes, *Sweet Saturday Night: Pop Song 1840-1920* (London: Panther, 1969), p 35.
4. Elliott’s make-up was more brown than black, hence ‘chocolate coloured’.
5. The scripts are at the BBC Written Archives Centre.
6. MacInnes, op cit, p 51.
7. BBC WAC R9/7/30: Audience Research Report, *The 1957 Television Minstrels*, 23 September 1957.
8. Michael Pickering, ‘The BBC’s *Kentucky Minstrels*, 1933-1950: Blackface Entertainment on British Radio’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol 16 no 2, 1996, pp 161-87.
9. BBC WAC R9/7/30: Audience Research Report, *The 1957 Television Minstrels*, 23 September 1957.

10. BBC WAC R9/7/34: Audience Research Report, *The Black and White Minstrel Show*, 30 June 1958.
11. *New Statesman*, 5 May 1967, p 629.
12. Interviews with Inns in *Weekly News* (Manchester), 22 February 1964, and London *Evening News*, 4 June 1966.
13. Ibid.
14. BBC WAC T16/92/12: Adam to Ronald Waldman, Head of Light Entertainment, Television, 11 July 1958.
15. BBC WAC R9/35/10: Audience Research Viewing Barometer, 1 January 1961 to 31 December 1961.
16. BBC WAC T16/92/2: Maschwitz, 'Notes on the Future of BBC Light Entertainment', April 1961.
17. *Daily Mail*, 27 May 1961.
18. A. H. Halsey with Josephine Webb, eds, *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 2000), p 143.
19. *Melody Maker*, 7 September 1957.
20. *Melody Maker*, 21 September 1957.
21. *The Listener*, 19 March 1959, p 525.
22. *Reynolds News*, 8 January 1961.
23. Black, *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1960; Purser, *Sunday Telegraph*, 3 December 1967.
24. *Record Mirror*, 20 May 1961.
25. *Melody Maker*, 8 July 1961.
26. *Yorkshire Evening News*, 11 July 1961.
27. BBC WAC T16/175/2: Thorne to Adam, 10 September 1962. 'Uncle Tom' as a derogatory term for black servility derives from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).
28. Ibid: Adam to Thorne, 11 September 1962.
29. *The Times*, 19 May 1967.
30. *Daily Mirror*, 19 May 1967.
31. BBC WAC R73/268/1: Quoted in a memorandum from Pat Spencer, research assistant on *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, to Asa Briggs, 16 January 1981.

32. BBC WAC R78/1921/1: Minutes of Board of Management Meeting, 22 May 1967.
33. BBC WAC: R78/1921/1: Thorne to Whitley, 19 May 1967.
34. Ibid: Whitley to Thorne, 26 May 1967.
35. BBC WAC T16/175/2: Minutes of Controllers' Meeting, 23 May 1967.
36. *The Times*, 19 May 1967.
37. Ibid, 23 May 1967.
38. *Evening Standard*, 24 May 1967.
39. *Daily Mirror*, 19 May 1967.
40. BBC WAC R78/1921/1: Duben to Sloan, 16 July 1967.
41. Ibid: Sloan to Lamb, 25 July 1967.
42. *Tribune*, 11 August 1967, p 10, and 18 August, p 8.
43. BBC WAC R78/1921/1: Board of Management Minutes, 21 and 28 August 1967.
44. J. Randy Taraborrelli, *Call Her Miss Ross: The Unauthorised Biography of Diana Ross* (London: Pan Books, 1991), pp 176-77.
45. Pickering, 'The BBC's *Kentucky Minstrels*', op cit, p 161.
46. BBC WAC R73/268/1: Pat Spencer, op cit.
47. BBC WAC R9/37/4: Audience Research Viewing Barometer, 1 January 1978 to 31 December 1978.
48. *Daily Mail*, 23 October 1986.
49. Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p 233.
50. Gerald Howat, *Learie Constantine* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975), pp 135-37.
51. Phillips and Phillips, op cit, p 315.
52. *Blackening-up in Britain*, Radio 4, 20 March 2003.

2. DEFERRING TO TRADITION: THE BBC AND THE MONARCHY

Introduction

Chapter I established the pattern of dealings between Buckingham Palace and the BBC during the 1950s and the BBC's attitude towards the monarchy. The Palace, through its press secretary, Commander Richard Colville, distrusted television and was determined to keep it away from the Royal Family except on very public occasions. Even then the BBC had usually to negotiate special terms. The BBC tried to extend its access to royal events and members of the Royal Family, but realised that nothing would come of trying to push too hard. Criticism of the monarchy was kept off the air and Lord Altrincham and Malcolm Muggeridge were prevented from repeating on the BBC what they had said in print.

During the 1960s there was a greater questioning of established institutions and Hugh Greene, the new Director-General, was happy to encourage this. But a reverential attitude towards the monarchy was powerfully ingrained in the BBC. Two episodes which illustrate this will be examined, together with the impact of the Richard Dimbleby style of commentary. Finally three BBC programmes about the monarchy, transmitted between 1962 and 1969, will be analysed to see how far attitudes were changing, in the BBC, at the Palace and in society.

Reverence, the Dimbleby style and the satirists

Early in 1960 *This Is Your Life* decided to feature Norman Hartnell, the royal dressmaker. The impact of the programme, which then went out live, depended on the subject having no prior knowledge. The Hartnell edition was due to be transmitted on 15 February 1960 but four days before it was cancelled. The BBC's decision was prompted by an intervention by the Lord Chamberlain. Sir Terence Nugent, the Chamberlain's Comptroller, wrote to T. Leslie Jackson, producer of *This Is Your Life*, to say he was sorry the programme 'had to be cancelled and something else substituted after all the work and trouble you had put in during the last five weeks'. But 'I had no alternative, in the interests of Mr Hartnell and the integrity of the Royal Warrant holders'.¹ Peter Dimmock, who was involved in BBC liaison with the Palace, replied in obsequious terms. 'How kind of you to write your letter of 11 February ... There is not,

of course - nor will there ever be - any feeling or suggestion from within the corporation that the Lord Chamberlain's office was in any way obstructive. We completely accept the situation and, although naturally disappointed, we thoroughly understand the point about the Royal Warrant. I am only sorry that you had to be bothered at all with this situation.'²

The question is how the Lord Chamberlain came to know that Hartnell was to appear on the programme. Jackson was quoted as saying that he had telephoned the Lord Chamberlain's office on the Friday before transmission, not because he thought he needed to seek permission but as a matter of courtesy. He was then told it was contrary to regulations governing Royal Warrant holders for Hartnell to appear and that it would be his duty to refuse to go.³ It appears that what prompted Jackson's call, however, was not simply courtesy but a leak to the newspapers, by someone who was to have appeared on the programme, that Hartnell was the subject.⁴

Despite Dimmock's fulsome letter, the BBC was clearly angry and determined to get further clarification. Nugent denied that the Lord Chamberlain had 'forbidden' the broadcast, but was merely pointing out to the BBC and Hartnell that it would be unfair to Hartnell 'to be precipitated without warning' into the programme. 'As soon as Mr Hartnell found out what was going on his duty really would be to walk off the set and surely this would have put him in a most embarrassing position.' Nugent said the BBC was entitled to make whatever arrangements with Hartnell it wished, provided Hartnell knew about them in advance and could ensure that regulations governing the Royal Warrant would not be broken. This meant that there was no mention of the Queen or other members of the Royal Family during the broadcast.⁵

To the BBC how Hartnell could have appeared on any programme without mentioning the Queen or Royal Family must have been a mystery. Moreover, he was currently writing for the *Star* newspaper, a fact which did not escape Kenneth Adam, the Controller of Television Programmes. His tart memorandum to Dimmock is in complete contrast to Dimmock's 'apology' to Nugent: 'I draw attention to the enclosed cutting from the *Star*. I think you will be entitled to ask Nugent how this personally written story in serial form by Hartnell squares with his refusal to proceed with Hartnell on *This Is Your Life*. We were, of course, put to considerable

inconvenience by meeting their request on this occasion.’⁶ Dimmock’s response is not on file.

The Hartnell episode is evidence of continuing nervousness within the BBC about upsetting the Palace, though Adam’s intervention suggests that not all BBC managers were prepared to roll over. An incident two years later also reveals this ambivalence, though the programme went out first and the nervousness came afterwards. Criticism of royalty in the *Daily Express* had led to a motion of censure in the House of Commons and a vigorous riposte from the Duke of Edinburgh. The *Tonight* programme decided to invite Kingsley Martin to comment. It is unlikely that Martin could have appeared under the Jacob regime. He had recently retired as Editor of the left-wing weekly, the *New Statesman*, and was a long-standing critic of the monarchy.

Much of Martin’s interview dealt with press criticism of the monarchy during the nineteenth century (on which he was writing a book). Asked about the current situation, Martin suggested that the British monarchy could have evolved into a sensible, working institution on the Scandinavian model but instead had developed ‘film-star’ habits. This was partly due to television but ‘a great deal of trouble has been due to the quite fantastically bad handling of press relations by Colville and others at the Palace’. As a result ‘they’ve got the press against them’. Martin detected a shift in public opinion with people wondering whether the monarchy was as perfect as it was supposed to be and whether, perhaps, it should be a serious job which did not merit the ‘TV fuss’.⁷

Although Colville had not seen the item, word got back to the BBC that he was unhappy about it. According to S. J. de Lotbiniere, who was in charge of BBC contacts with Buckingham Palace, Colville had heard ‘from several quarters’ that ‘we had let Kingsley Martin get away with some pretty rough statements without apparently attempting to put another point of view’. Lotbiniere asked that a transcript be sent to Colville.⁸ Colville acknowledged receipt without comment. Apart, perhaps, from the criticism of Colville himself, Martin’s remarks were hardly ‘rough’ but the BBC had again been forced on the defensive in face of Palace sensitivity.

If BBC caution in dealing with the Palace was one inheritance of the Greene regime, another was the style of handling big royal occasions which was mainly set by

the commentaries of Richard Dimbleby. As a young journalist in the 1930s Dimbleby had been instrumental in breaking a BBC taboo against having its own news reporters when he covered the Crystal Palace fire. He became a distinguished war correspondent, the first to enter the Belsen concentration camp when it was liberated in 1945. From 'hard' news he made his reputation after the war for his coverage of royal occasions, with the 1953 Coronation as his apogee. From then until his early death from cancer 12 years later he was BBC television's principal voice at royal events.

Dimbleby was widely praised for his professionalism. He was imperturbable and able to speak fluently for hours on end, essential on live broadcasts where events could run behind schedule or the picture lost through technical breakdowns. Prodigious homework ensured that he had enough material to cover any eventuality. When Princess Margaret and her new husband were late for their departure on the Royal Yacht in 1960 he had to extemporise for half an hour.⁹ Robin Day, for a time a rival commentator but a great admirer, called him a 'master craftsman', adding that Dimbleby 'knew every jewel in the Imperial Crown and every stitch in a Herald's tabard'.¹⁰ But behind his craftsmanship lay an attitude. He was more than a neutral commentator, merely annotating the images on the screen.

Dimbleby had no firm political allegiances, which is why all three main political parties approached him to be their parliamentary candidate. His belief in the British monarchy, however, was deep and unshakeable and 'he had no doubt that his job was to preserve and enhance its prestige'.¹¹ Critics of the monarchy might argue that it was socially divisive and incompatible with a modern democracy. For Dimbleby it was precisely the opposite: 'Parliamentary democracy, the system of government which guarantees protection for all of us, flourishes best, it seems, where there is monarchy.'¹² Furthermore, he was moved by the ceremonial and ritual which was the monarchy's public expression and became the raw material for his commentaries. It was through television that most people received their image of the monarchy and in Dimbleby it had a supreme champion. According to his son: 'It is probable that ... Richard Dimbleby did more than any other individual to secure the position of the monarchy in the affections of the British people.'¹³

The Dimbleby style remained unchallenged until October 1958 when, for the first

time, television covered the State Opening of Parliament. Also, for the first time on a major royal occasion, ITV was allowed to transmit the BBC footage and supply its own commentary. The task fell to Day, who had joined Independent Television News from its outset and had done much to pioneer a less deferential treatment of politicians. But he enjoyed ceremonial and in describing the State Opening did not set out to be mocking or derogatory. He saw his job as 'to convey the contemporary political meaning'. So while Dimbleby described the ceremony on its own terms, celebrating the ritual, Day tried to highlight the political realities which underlay it: 'The Monarch has the pomp without the power. The Commons has the power and no pomp. The Lords, as you see, have their pomp but very little power.' He stressed that because a Conservative government was in power, the Queen was reading a Conservative speech. He made a joke about the loquacious Field Marshal Montgomery 'having a silent role on this occasion'¹⁴, Dimbleby did not make jokes. His version was: 'There is Viscount Montgomery, chosen this year to carry the great Sword of State.'

Day's summing-up was down-to-earth: 'A new session of Parliament has been opened. The Queen will go back to Buckingham Palace. The crown will go back to the Tower of London. All the scarlet and ermine robes will go back to wherever they came from. And Parliament will go back to work; to pensions, education, unemployment, strikes, Cyprus, disarmament and the rest of it.' Dimbleby's prose was more florid: 'As Her Majesty returns to the robing room and thence to Buckingham Palace, she leaves behind in all us us a memory of a State occasion at its most magnificent.' Day ended his commentary by again underlining the political reality behind the ceremony: 'Everyone is wondering at Westminster what government will write the next speech from the throne. Before Her Majesty sits on it again there may be a general election. This is where we have our say.' Dimbleby eschewed the civics lesson and emphasised history and tradition: 'The throne remains, rich, shining - near, yet remote - the symbol of this rare meeting of the Queen, the Lords, the Commons - the Three Estates of Parliament. And so begins, with ceremony that springs from the very roots of our democratic history, the fourth session of the three hundredth Parliament of the Realm.'¹⁵ Dimbleby's delivery was hushed, solemn and measured, Day's crisp and business-like.

The viewing public overwhelmingly watched the BBC transmission, perhaps

because they knew the Dimbleby style and were happy with it. In April 1963 the BBC and ITV covered the wedding of Princess Alexandra of Kent, with Dimbleby again providing the BBC commentary. The BBC claimed 18 million viewers against ITV's four million and although ITV's TAM figure had the BBC in front by only two to one, the majority preference was still clear.¹⁶ However the audience was split, a total of 22 million people watching the wedding of a comparatively minor member of the royal family is evidence of a huge public appetite for royal occasions, suggesting that the apparently more cynical and sceptical mood of the early 1960s had not spread very far.

One manifestation of this mood was the emergence of satire, to which the BBC contributed *That Was the Week That Was*, first broadcast in November 1962. What is striking about *TW3* is that it left the Royal Family more or less alone. The most notable exception was in any case more an attack on what its author called 'the bland pomposity of Richard Dimbleby's commentaries on royal occasions' than on the monarchy itself. The sketch was written by Ian Lang, later a Conservative Cabinet minister, when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge. An attempt to include the sketch in a Cambridge Footlights revue in the West End was stopped by the Lord Chamberlain, evidence that theatre censorship (though soon to be abolished) was tougher than BBC self-censorship.¹⁷ Lang's mock commentary describes the sinking of the Royal Barge, 'sliding gracefully, almost regally, beneath the waters of the Pool of London ... and now the Queen, smiling radiantly, is swimming for her life. Her Majesty is wearing a silk ensemble in canary yellow'.¹⁸ Although the sketch brought more complaints than any royal item, it was neither very biting nor a good parody of Dimbleby's style. Ned Sherrin, the producer, denied that royalty was deliberately avoided but he conceded that 'none of our items dealing with the Royal Family had the cutting edge that those with political or religious content sported'.¹⁹

From obeisance to 'lifting the veil': three documentaries

The BBC decided to mount a special programme in February 1962 to mark the tenth anniversary of the Queen's accession. It hoped that outside broadcast cameras could visit Buckingham Palace, but the Palace maintained its ban on allowing cameras inside, except on rare occasions. So the programme had to settle for a compilation of existing

footage with a commentary written and narrated by the journalist, Patrick O'Donovan.²⁰ A synopsis was sent to Colville a fortnight before transmission, perhaps to guard the corporation's back after the Hartnell incident.²¹ In the event, the precaution was unnecessary. Although Colville was unable to see the finished programme he let the BBC know that 'he has heard nothing but commendation for it'.²²

O'Donovan set the tone in *Radio Times*. The monarchy seemed 'to have reached a serene plateau far above party loyalties and changing controversy; it is reached now by only the most trivial or subjective sort of criticism'. Moreover, 'its prestige in the world is unique ... the British Monarch is greeted today ... with a respect, enthusiasm and pleasure that are accorded to no other human being in the world. A great deal of this, of course, has to do with the charm and integrity of the Queen herself ...'²³ The programme opens with a brief historical survey, finding a good word for each of the Queen's immediate predecessors.²⁴ The Abdication crisis is blamed on politicians who found Edward VIII's overtures to the unemployed suspect and his marriage unsuitable. George VI 'had no difficulty working with the socialists'. As for the Queen, foreign heads of state treat her with a kindly deference they would accord to no one else. The press is criticised for its 'cruel curiosity' about the Queen's private life.

O'Donovan's commentary concedes that there is criticism but dismisses it. Some find the monarchy too attached to a single class. Some object to the bestowal of titles for political purposes. But 'the Queen is the fount of honour' and 'the ruling party can use this fount to reward its followers'. O'Donovan notes that presentation of debutantes has been abandoned, though the garden party 'remains the reward of hard work, social climbing or the right connections'. But while 'it is possible to mock at, or disapprove of this ... it is no essential part of the institution'. He is soon back on a more positive track, concluding: 'Because the monarchy is old and rare and beautiful, because it is shaped and reshaped in our image, people can and do identify with it and emerge comforted and enhanced'. No doubt Buckingham Palace felt 'comforted and enhanced' by a programme which could have almost been scripted by Colville himself.

Towards the end of 1965 John Grist, Assistant Head of Current Affairs, suggested a series of four programmes on the monarchy to be presented by Day (who had joined the BBC from ITV in 1959). It soon ran into opposition. In November

Adam, now Director of Television, asked Huw Wheldon, Controller of Programmes, whether he wanted to go ahead with the project 'in view of the obvious difficulties'.²⁵ Wheldon passed the decision to Michael Peacock, Controller of BBC1, who decided not to proceed. Peacock said he 'did not feel a subject as sensitive as this should be handled by a freelance producer' [a reference to Grist's choice, Jeremy Murray-Brown], that the series needed more time to prepare and that it was not suitable for four 25-minute films but instead should be one 50-minute documentary.²⁶ The decision was conveyed to Grist, who sent an angry riposte to Wheldon.²⁷

Grist noted that Greene himself had ruled that there was no major policy objection to the series, which suggests that any project involving the monarchy had to be approved at the top. Grist claimed that the problem was fear. 'The attitude of the BBC is quite simple - why cause trouble in this area when we have sufficient trouble elsewhere? I do resent the assumption that there would necessarily be trouble with the amount of experience that Day, Murray-Brown and I can mount. It seems to me there is something fundamentally wrong with the BBC when people who wish to do a serious study of institutions in this country should be prevented because of actions of uncontrolled people in other parts of the television service. There is undoubtedly a two-value system operating in this case. It is all right for *BBC-3* [a satirical successor to *TW3*] to do items about royalty, but impossible for this subject to be tackled seriously by current affairs experts.'

Grist's outburst seems to have had its effect for soon afterwards the project was revived. But still there was caution. An emollient letter was sent to Sir Michael Adeane, the Queen's Private Secretary, assuring him 'it is a subject we are approaching with great care'. The object 'would not be to produce a sensational treatment, but to add to the sum of knowledge and to the understanding of the television audience'. No member of the Royal Family would be approached for an interview.²⁸ At the end of January 1966 Grist visited Buckingham Palace and saw Colville: 'The whole atmosphere was extremely amiable and helpful'.²⁹

By September, however, the planned four-part series had been dropped in favour of a special edition of *Panorama* to be broadcast on 14 November 1966, the 18th birthday of the Prince of Wales. Murray-Brown was still the producer but the presenter

would be not Day but James Mossman (eventually it was Michael Charlton). In October Murray-Brown went to see Colville and at the beginning of November Grist sent a lengthy memorandum to Greene. That Grist should have felt it necessary to acquaint the Director-General with the details of a programme before transmission suggests that there was still some nervousness. Grist reassured Greene that while the programme raised objections to the monarchy, that it was remote, too expensive and had a class image that held back progress, 'none of these criticisms emerge very strongly'. Grist also noted that Murray-Brown worked for the Conservative Party during the 1964 general election, and added: 'He is not likely to produce anything very startling, but I think it will be solid and respectable.'³⁰

That *Panorama* should raise criticisms at all was in contrast to the O'Donovan documentary. Moreover, a national opinion poll was commissioned for the programme and while only 4% thought the monarchy should be abolished, 54% thought it should change with the times and 49% thought it perpetuated class differences (though only half of those thought this was a bad thing). Among those interviewed was John Grigg, who as Lord Altrincham had been kept off the BBC nine years before. Introduced as 'then and now an ardent monarchist', Grigg repeated his previous strictures that the royal programme should be less rigid and courtiers more representative of the population. He also came up with a new suggestion, that the Queen, like Wilhelmina in the Netherlands, might eventually step down to give her heir a chance. Grigg, however, was only one of six interviewees and the others were broadly supportive of the monarchy in its present state. They included Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the former Conservative Prime Minister, Robert Blake, the historian, and, perhaps surprisingly, Emanuel Shinwell, the Labour Party veteran.³¹ Grigg's remarks, and the programme as a whole, caused hardly a ripple.

Early in 1968 the BBC approached Buckingham Palace to ask whether it could televise a royal banquet during a State visit, something that hitherto had not been allowed. Dimmock, who was in charge of BBC liaison, was hopeful. He told Wheldon: 'As you know, there is a distinct wind of change at the Palace. It has been growing in momentum over the past few months'.³² This change was largely due to William Heseltine, who had succeeded Colville as Palace press secretary. An Australian with no

links to the British aristocracy, Heseltine was determined to make the Royal Family more accessible, to refute criticism that it was stuffy and remote and counteract the triviality of the gossip columns.

His opportunity came soon after he took the job. When it became known early in 1968 that Prince Charles would be invested as Prince of Wales in the following year, the Palace received requests from all over the world for facilities to make film and television programmes featuring Charles. The Palace decided it would be better if there were one authoritative film, not merely about Charles but about the role he would one day inherit. This meant showing the Queen carrying out that role and it was decided to grant unprecedented facilities to make this possible.³³

Heseltine was a prime mover behind the project, with Lord Brabourne, son-in-law of Lord Mountbatten and a film producer. They in turn convinced Prince Philip, who managed to persuade an initially reluctant Queen.³⁴ The BBC, perhaps as a reward for its reverential coverage of the Royal Family, was chosen to make the film, though ITV would also show it and handle the world-wide sales and distribution. Brabourne suggested Richard Cawston as the producer/director. Cawston, then Head of Documentary Programmes at the BBC, was likely to be a safe pair of hands. He had made his name with a series of skilful and lucid documentaries on British institutions and professions, including the BBC itself, the National Health Service, the education system, lawyers and pilots. His method was observational rather than interrogatory, his aim to show what the institution was like and how it functioned. He let the subject speak for itself, and did not impose his own views. Perhaps most important in the context of the Royal Family project, he established a trust with his subjects which enabled him to take the camera where it would not normally be allowed.³⁵

Royal Family took just under a year to shoot and more than 43 hours of footage were reduced to 105 minutes for the finished film. The promise of unprecedented access was kept. For the first time the cameras were allowed behind the scenes at Buckingham Palace and to capture informal moments on the Royal Train and inside Balmoral and Sandringham. 'No requests for filming were turned down. When the Queen saw the completed film, no cuts were asked for or made'.³⁶ But if Cawston was free to make his own selection from the 43 hours of material, he would have been aware

of what would be acceptable to the Queen and what not. It has been argued that 'Cawston exercised a self-censorship as rigorous as the Palace would have applied had it been left to them'.³⁷ Without knowledge of the discarded footage this can only be speculation, but it is reasonable to assume that given the amount of co-operation from the Palace, Cawston would not have tried to push his luck.

Cawston built the film around a year in the life of the Royal Family, both public and off-duty. It had a commentary, written by Antony Jay (one of the pioneers of *Tonight*) and delivered by the entertainer, Michael Flanders. The film has four main themes.³⁸ The first, implicitly rebutting any idea that the Queen and other members of the Royal Family have an easy existence, is to emphasise how hard-working they are. The Sovereign is shown conscientiously going through her red boxes, in Buckingham Palace, on the Royal Train and Balmoral, where 'the Queen is on holiday but not off duty'. A royal tour of Chile involves 104 engagements in 14 days, with nine speeches, 14 guards of honour, 23 receptions and shaking hands with 2,500 people. Other members of the family are busy in their own right. The Duke of Edinburgh is patron of 373 organisations.

The second theme is the monarchy's historical continuity. It is pointed out that Prince Charles will be the 64th Sovereign in a line stretching back 1,000 years. The red box containing the state papers goes back to George IV. When the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, goes to Buckingham Palace for his weekly audience with the Queen, he is continuing a ritual practised by Lord North and George III. No one knows what Prince Charles will make of the job of King, the commentary observes, but, neatly returning to where it began, 'if he needs help there's 1,000 years of family experience to call on'.

The third element is a robust argument for the continuation of the monarchy as a guarantor of democracy. While the Queen occupies the highest office of state no one else can. No politicians can take over the law, no generals can take over the government. While she is head of the armed forces no would-be dictator can turn the army against the people. 'The strength of the Monarchy does not lie in the power of the Sovereign but in the power it denies to everyone else'. The film is an endorsement of the Monarchy as it is, legitimised by centuries of tradition. There is no hint of criticism (except an attempt to forestall it by remarking that the royal Rolls-Royces are all at least

eight years old) or suggestion that the institution needs to change with the times.

The fourth theme is that the royals are a family, much like any other. The sequence most remarked on at the time, though it takes up barely three minutes of screen time, is the barbecue by the lake at Balmoral, with Princess Anne looking after the sausages and her father the steaks and the Queen announcing that 'the salad is ready'. The Queen takes five-year-old Prince Edward into the Balmoral village store for a lollipop and tells him not to make a mess with it in the car. At Sandringham the family sits round a television set, chortling at *I Love Lucy*. Although the accents are not those of most of the Queen's subjects, these intimate glimpses are constructed to suggest that away from the public ceremonial the Royal Family relaxes much as anybody else.

On its first showing on the BBC on 21 June 1969 *Royal Family* had an audience of 23 million. When it was repeated on ITV eight days later, 15 million people saw it, of which 9 million were new viewers and 6 million watching for the second time. The reaction index was a very high 85. Altogether the programme was seen by 63% of the population.³⁹ This huge audience, and high appreciation, suggest that the monarchy had not been significantly touched by the mood of scepticism that had permeated elsewhere during the 1960s. On the contrary, the effect of *Royal Family* seems to have been to increase public regard for the monarch. The BBC asked a sample of viewers to rate the Queen on a set of criteria before and after seeing the film. All the scores were higher after the viewing, significantly so on aspects such as 'happy', 'warm', 'in touch', 'inspiring', 'lively' and 'approachable'.⁴⁰

The press reaction was overwhelmingly favourable. Maurice Wiggin called it a 'brilliant and wholly engrossing film'.⁴² For George Melly it was 'a brilliant film perfectly attuned to its age'.⁴⁴ Adam, now retired from the BBC, put Cawston in the same league as important figures in cinema documentary such as Robert Flaherty and John Grierson.⁴³ Willie Hamilton, Labour MP and prominent critic of the Royal Family, was less impressed: 'It was one big soft sell - like a very long TV commercial selling a new washing powder ... What we saw was a tweedy, upper-class family, all with impeccable Oxford accents, mixing with others out of the same top drawer.'⁴⁴ A more surprising dissenter, given her background of public school, Oxford and glossy fashion magazines, was the journalist Anne Scott-James. She was 'no republican' but

‘the current wave of royal mania ... seems to me as silly as the worst excesses of the 1950s. I found the royal film embarrassing and the Investiture [on 1 July 1969] absurd, while the gush that has been poured out about both is little different from the Crawfie days when every woman’s magazine had a royal face on the cover every week ... ’ She went on: ‘The royal film ... was so extravagantly praised that it seems the mere sight of royalty (and this is 1969) suspends the whole critical faculty. The revelation that the royals have arms, legs, heads and so on, just like the rest of us, and eat ice-creams and pineapple shape, appears to have bowled the nation over ... What we got was soap opera, with an extravagant helping of equerries, flunkeys, banquets and jewels.’⁴⁵

A criticism of another kind was that by allowing such a degree of access, particularly to its life off-duty, the Royal Family would be creating trouble for itself. Milton Shulman observed that ‘every institution that has so far attempted to use TV to popularise or aggrandise itself has been diminished and trivialised by it ... Now that the monarchy has succumbed to the temptation of using TV, there is a danger that it, too, will lose its essential mystique and distance that has been the bulwark of its survival. ... If a precedent to reveal the intimate life of kings and queens is established, what will happen one day when a member of the Throne has a private life that is clearly in serious divergence from the image being projected upon the box?’⁴⁶

The Palace, however, was undismayed. In a letter of congratulation to Cawston, Adeane, who must have been reflecting the views of his employer, wrote: ‘Inevitably, working here, one looks at it from the point of view of: it is good for the monarchy? and I perfectly understand the people who think it may be a mistake to remove too many veils from this venerable institution. In my opinion it is just as much a mistake not to remove any veils and I think that in the climate of 1969 you have just about removed the right number and, what is more, removed them with the best possible taste.’⁴⁷ The BBC had done exactly what the monarchy had hoped.

Conclusion

The striking aspect of BBC coverage of the monarchy during the 1960s is how little it changed. Even the satirical programmes saved their sharpest barbs for other institutions while royal occasions continued to be covered in the reverential Dimbleby style and

documentaries about the Royal Family proceeded only with the greatest caution. The 1966 *Panorama* programme did broach criticisms of the monarchy, and allow the public to have a say through an opinion poll, which would have been unthinkable less than ten years before. But this was more than balanced by favourable comment. *Royal Family* was made on the initiative of the Palace, not the BBC, but the BBC became a willing collaborator in the Palace's attempt to dispel the monarchy's stuffy image. The Palace's attitude to television changed more than the BBC's attitude to the monarchy and the huge audiences for *Royal Family* and for royal weddings, suggest that despite a supposedly more sceptical attitude in society there was overwhelming endorsement for the monarchical status quo. The vast majority of the British people remained determinedly pro-royal and the BBC continued to give powerful expression to this.

Notes

1. BBC WAC T16/186/6: Lt-Col Sir Terence Nugent to Leslie Jackson, 11 February 1960.
2. BBC WAC T16/186/6: Peter Dimmock to Nugent, 15 February 1960.
3. *Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1960.
4. BBC WAC T16/186/6: George Campey, Head of Publicity, to Cecil McGivern, Deputy Director of Television Broadcasting, 18 February 1960.
5. BBC WAC T16/186/6: Nugent to Eric Maschwitz, Head of Light Entertainment, 16 March 1960.
6. BBC WAC T16/186/6: Adam to Dimmock, 18 March 1960.
7. BBC WAC: transcript of the interview.
8. BBC WAC T16/186/7: S. J. de Lotbiniere to Leonard Miall, Assistant Controller, Current Affairs and Talks, 26 March 1962.
9. Jonathan Dimbleby, *Richard Dimbleby, a Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 256.
10. Robin Day, *Grand Inquisitor* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p 112.
11. Jonathan Dimbleby, op cit, pp 231, 237.
12. Ibid, p 237.
13. Ibid, p 263.

14. Day, op cit, p 112-114.
15. The quotations are from Day, op cit, pp 112-14 and Dimbleby, op cit, p 342.
16. *Contrast*, Summer 1963, p 238.
17. Humphrey Carpenter, *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom of the 1960s* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000), p 251. According to Ben Pimlott, *The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p 321, it was the Duchess Theatre which dropped the sketch, anticipating a Lord Chamberlain ban.
18. BBC WAC has the full text.
19. Ned Sherrin, *A Small Thing - Like an Earthquake* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p 84.
20. BBC WAC, T16/186/7: Miall to Stuart Hood, Controller of Programmes, 22 January 1962.
21. BBC WAC, T16/186/7: Colville to de Lotbiniere, 25 January 1962.
22. BBC WAC, T16/186/7: de Lotbiniere to Miall, 7 February 1962.
23. *Radio Times*, 1 February 1962, p 27.
24. BBC WAC has a full transcript from which all references and quotations are taken.
25. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Adam to Wheldon, 30 November 1965.
26. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Peacock to Wheldon, undated.
27. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Grist to Wheldon, 13 December 1965.
28. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Draft letter to Adeane, undated but probably January 1966.
29. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Grist to Wheldon, 28 January 1966.
30. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Grist to Greene, 1 November 1966.
31. BBC WAC has a full transcript.
32. BBC WAC T16/186/8: Dimmock to Wheldon, 14 February 1968.
33. *Ariel* [BBC house magazine], June 1969, pp 12-13.
34. Pimlott, op cit, p 379.
35. Antony Jay, entry on Cawston, *The Dictionary of National Biography 1986-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp 61-62.
36. BBC WAC T56/248/1: BBC press release, June 1969.
37. Pimlott, op cit, p 381.
38. Viewing copy in the National Film and Television Archive.
39. BBC WAC T65/248/1: BBC audience research.

40. BBC WAC VR/69/375: BBC Audience Research Report, October 1969.
41. *Sunday Times*, 22 June 1969.
42. *The Observer*, 22 June 1969.
43. London *Evening News*, 24 June 1969.
44. *Sunday Mail* (Glasgow), 29 June 1969.
45. *Sunday Times*, 6 July 1969. Crawfie was Marion Crawford, governess to Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, whose published account of her time in royal service was typical of the fawning tone of much royal coverage in the 1950s.
46. London *Evening Standard*, 25 June 1969.
47. BBC WAC T56/337/1: Adeane to Cawston, 24 June 1969.

V. PRESSURES FROM WITHOUT

1. MARY WHITEHOUSE AND THE ‘NEW MORALITY’

Introduction

The fiercest external critics of the BBC during the 1960s were Mary Whitehouse and the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. Although they came from different ideological positions, the religious right and the political left, they had much in common. For both the pivotal year was 1963. Wilson, after the death of Hugh Gaitskell, became leader of the Labour Party and a potential Prime Minister and Whitehouse, increasingly disturbed by manifestations of what she called the New Morality (the capital letters were hers), sowed the seeds of the Clean-Up TV Campaign. Both compared the behaviour of the BBC unfavourably with that of ITV and wanted to see greater control of the corporation. Wilson’s appointment of Lord Hill as a strong BBC Chairman was applauded by Whitehouse and arguably led to the early retirement of her bete noire, Hugh Greene. Yet if Whitehouse and Wilson expected Hill to mend the BBC’s ways, they were disappointed.

Whitehouse’s campaign continued well beyond the 1960s and eventually took in theatre, cinema, video and the printed word. But it began as a reaction to what she saw as the decline in moral standards in the 1960s and she singled out television as the main offender. After examining the origins of her beliefs, and the genesis of her campaign, the focus of this section is on Whitehouse’s relations with television and particularly the BBC.

The roots of a campaign and the BBC response

Whitehouse’s opposition to the New Morality was shaped partly by age and social class. In 1963, when she first became disturbed by what she saw on television, she was 53 and of a generation that had grown up before the frank public discussion of sex or the use of bad language in the broadcast media. She was also unsympathetic to what she saw as the excesses of the young. Socially she belonged to the lower end of the middle class. Her father was a small businessman whose ventures were not always successful and the family needed a resourceful mother to hold it together. The accent

was on thrift, self-discipline and respectability, values which she saw being undermined during the 1960s. Critics accused her of social snobbery and in attacking 'kitchen sink' plays for their sexual promiscuity and raw language, she seemed implicitly to be equating this with the mores of the working class. But the most potent guiding principles in her life came from the Christian religion. In particular she was influenced by the Oxford Group, later known as Moral Rearmament (MRA), which she joined as a young woman. In personal behaviour MRA's emphasis was on the four absolutes of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and on the confession of sins. The spiritual approach was extended to social problems, to which the answer was not political action but divine guidance. As Whitehouse put it in discussing her debt to MRA, 'I don't believe you can change society without changing men'.¹ But MRA was a controversial organisation and Whitehouse's connection with it helped to colour the BBC's attitude towards her.

Whitehouse's Christianity emphasised traditional morality, eschewing sexual relations before and outside marriage and regarding marriage itself as a sacred trust. She was opposed to the relaxation of the abortion laws and regarded homosexuality as a sin, though she took the Christian stance of loving the sinner. She could not be accused of hypocrisy. As a young single woman she fell in love with a married man. But she insisted that the relationship was not sexual and, realising it was wrong, ended it.² When, married and expecting twins, her health deteriorated and she was told that the babies were likely to be born delicate she rejected an abortion. Although the twins did not survive, she never regretted the decision.³ Her marriage to Ernest Whitehouse, an industrial coppersmith, produced three other children, and although there were health and financial problems it was a close, loving and supportive unit, a model of what to her marriage should be.

What Whitehouse saw in the 1960s was a sustained attack on her staunchly held beliefs. The state was increasingly intervening in what she regarded as moral areas. During the 1960s laws were passed to make divorce easier, legalise abortion and decriminalise homosexual acts between consenting adults. Even the Church of England disappointed her. She deplored the modern view of Christianity put forward by the Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, in his book, *Honest to God* (1963), which

became a best-seller. But television, with its power to bring the New Morality directly into people's homes, became her main target.

Whitehouse was no intellectual, nor did she pretend to be. She did not shine at school except at games, and when she took up teaching as a profession her subject was art, not regarded as an academic discipline. Her responses to television programmes were intuitive and emotional rather than analytical. Sweeping condemnation came before reasoned argument. She was convinced that television had a direct influence on personal behaviour and quoted 19 examples from the Lincolnshire police area in 1964 and 1965 of crimes supposedly inspired by television programmes.⁴ John Barnett, the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire, was one of her main supporters. She was shocked by a BBC programme in the religious series, *Meeting Point*, entitled 'What Kind of Loving?' (8 March 1964), not because she had seen it but because of the message it had given to her pupils. A panel comprising a headmistress, the wife of Bishop Robinson, a Church of England priest and a psychiatrist discussed sexual behaviour among young people. One of her pupils told Whitehouse that having seen the programme she knew that she must not have intercourse until she was engaged.⁵

Apart from discussion programmes Whitehouse's attacks were centred on drama, particularly the *Wednesday Play* series. A correspondence with Sydney Newman, the Head of Drama, reveals the divergence in outlook between herself and the BBC. She complained that *A Man On Her Back*, a play by William Sansom and Peter Luke, 'demonstrated a vicious threat of violence and presented promiscuous thinking and behaviour as normal and unquestioned'.⁶ Newman defended the play as upholding 'the deep and profound virtues of compassion' and went on to pinpoint 'a fundamental conflict in the two ways of judging the social impact of plays'. One, to quote Hamlet, was 'to hold the mirror up to nature'. Drama should reflect for the viewer the tensions and virtues of his own age, to promote a better understanding of it, leading in turn to a better informed citizenry. A second view [essentially that of Whitehouse] was that plays must present ideal behaviour in the belief that audiences emulated what they saw on the screen. Newman said that both points of view, separately and together, were continually demonstrated in the BBC's drama output but that *Wednesday Play* policy was to hold closer to the Shakespearean definition. However, the *Wednesday Play* represented only

6% of the BBC's drama output. The other 94% included an abundance of non-controversial and socially worthwhile material ranging from *Dr Finlay's Casebook* to the dramatisation of the classics.⁷

Whitehouse's view that television should be positive and uplifting extended beyond drama. She took exception to *Don't Count the Candles* (4 April 1968), a documentary by Lord Snowdon which highlighted the problems of old age. To Whitehouse the treatment had been 'highly selective and by no means objective' and she said that people (presumably the elderly) had been so upset and disturbed by it that they could not stay alone in their homes after seeing it. She also claimed that the film had been 'widely interpreted as propaganda for euthanasia'.⁸

Accusing the BBC of making propaganda was another consistent Whitehouse theme. One of her objections to *Up the Junction* (3 November 1965), apart from presenting promiscuity as normal, was that it was propaganda for legalising abortion. Nell Dunn, the writer, and Ken Loach, the director, might not have disagreed, but she was on shakier ground when she complained to Lord Normanbrook, the BBC Chairman, that an item on abortion in the current affairs programme, *24 Hours*, on 2 June 1967 'showed a blatant bias' and appeared to be an attempt to influence public opinion in favour of David Steel's Bill then before Parliament. The BBC pointed out that Steel's appearance on the programme had been more than balanced by eminent gynaecologists opposed to the Bill.⁹ Whitehouse's critics suspected that her concern was not so much with balance as giving prominence, and to her mind legitimacy, to a point of view of which she disapproved.

Whitehouse first approached the BBC to relay her concerns in the middle of 1963. On 31 June she telephoned the secretary of the Chairman, Sir Arthur fforde. According to a secretary's note she wanted to talk 'about the morals and standards of the BBC and its programmes'. The secretary added, with an exclamation mark, that she was in London for a Moral Rearmament conference. fforde declined to see her.¹⁰ It appears that she next wrote to Greene, again to ask for a meeting. Greene was abroad but Harman Grisewood, his Chief Assistant, did agree to see her. Subsequently Grisewood and his wife had supper with Whitehouse and her family and, according to her account, was sympathetic to her complaints about the impact of television on young

people.¹¹ But Grisewood, whom she saw as an ally, retired from the BBC soon afterwards.

Meanwhile, seeing no improvement in the BBC's programmes, and dismayed that Parliament had seemingly ignored the concerns of people like herself by renewing the BBC Charter for ten years, Whitehouse decided to go further than writing letters. In January 1964, with Norah Buckland, the wife of a Staffordshire rector, she launched the Clean-Up TV Campaign. Its manifesto declared that 'we women of Britain [this was later amended to include men] believe in a Christian way of life' and deplored attempts to belittle or destroy it. 'In particular we object to the propaganda of disbelief, doubt and dirt that the BBC projects into millions of homes through the television screen'. It contended that 'crime, violence, illegitimacy and venereal disease are steadily increasing, yet the BBC employs people whose ideas and advice pander to the lowest in human nature and accompany this with a stream of suggestive and erotic plays which present promiscuity, infidelity and drinking as normal and inevitable'. It called on the BBC for a radical change of policy and demanded programmes 'which build character instead of destroying it, and encourage and sustain faith in God and bring Him back to the heart of our family and national life'.¹²

Whitehouse later admitted that the manifesto was too dogmatic and made no recognition of 'the many people working in the BBC whose programmes were first class in every respect'.¹³ Even so, the manifesto was repeated word for word in a petition presented to the House of Commons by one of Whitehouse's main parliamentary supporters, James Dance, Conservative MP for Bromsgrove, 18 months later, suggesting that her second thoughts had taken a long time to germinate. Meanwhile the intemperate language of the manifesto was playing into the BBC's hands. Doreen Stephens, Head of Family Programmes, sent a copy to Huw Wheldon, Controller of Television Programmes, pointing out that its claims had been rejected by another women's body, the Mothers' Union Television Watching Group. While agreeing with the belief in a Christian way of life, and the need not to belittle or destroy it, the group said that 'to indict the BBC alone for propaganda which undermines standards and morals is neither fair nor realistic, nor to suggest that the BBC is contributing any more than any other field of mass media to the many signs of ill-

health in our society'. Stephens commented: 'I am nursing this set-up [the Mothers' Union Group] along as it is pretty powerful and I think they might prove very influential and useful in the event of this other "monstrous regiment of women" becoming too much of a menace!'¹⁴

On 5 May 1964, the day after Stephens's memo, the Clean-Up TV Campaign held its first public meeting, filling the 2,000-seat Birmingham Town Hall. The BBC sent an observer, Kenneth Bird, and his report, a copy of which was passed to Wheldon and to Kenneth Adam, Director of Television, was hostile. 'This meeting', Bird wrote, 'created three main impressions. It was comical, especially when a Methodist from Salford couldn't remember the message which God had confided to her over breakfast; sinister, because of the ruthless, non-Christian way in which all but their own Christian views were suppressed; menacing, in that a nationwide movement threatens to grow out of a stream of unctuous platitudes.' Bird reported how David Turner, whose BBC play *Trevor* had attracted complaints, asked to address the meeting but was refused. Turner had later told the *Birmingham Post* that he had never seen such violence in people who advocated non-violence.¹⁵

Other accounts were more measured. In a double-handed compliment *The Times* observed that 'perhaps never in the history of Birmingham Town Hall has such a successful meeting been sponsored by such a flimsy organisation. There are no committee members, no officers and no hard plans for the future except for the hope that the people at this meeting will go out and spread the word in other parts of the country'. The report added that 'there are those who will find it easy enough to laugh at the women who were here tonight. Yet a good many of the speakers had experience as teachers or social workers who were seriously concerned with social questions in the field'.¹⁶ The BBC, however, already stung by the language of the manifesto, was not prepared to give the campaign credibility, though Whitehouse and her supporters had thrown it on the defensive. A week after the Birmingham meeting, Adam told senior colleagues that future programmes had been rechecked to ensure that no further fuel would be given to the campaign and reported the judgment of the BBC's Assistant Head of Publicity that public opinion was not necessarily in the corporation's favour.¹⁷

In an attempt to head off the Clean-Up TV Campaign, the BBC again sought to

demonstrate that it was not representative. Adam followed up a suggestion from Stephens to invite representatives of 16 women's organisations, representing ten million people, to discuss with the BBC their feelings about television programmes. Greene reported to the Board of Governors that the general view had been encouraging.¹⁸ According to Adam, who was at the meeting, what the delegates had to say about BBC television 'was very different from what we hear from Mrs Whitehouse'. The discussion had been 'knowledgeable and constructive, qualities noticeably absent from the Clean-Up TV Campaign'. He added that 'from such responsible bodies [as the Mothers' Union] I reckon I have much to learn. To those who are abusive and ignorant I shall continue to turn a deaf ear'.¹⁹

With the Clean-Up TV Campaign in mind, the BBC went on to the offensive over its drama policy. While Whitehouse had attacked plays for their sex and violence, Adam retorted that it was impossible to imagine drama without them: 'They have been part of it since it began, from Aeschylus through Shakespeare to the moderns. So if you ask me are we going to cut out sex and violence the answer is no. If these themes were to be eliminated, much of the great drama of the past and promising drama of the present would never appear on our screens at all'. He went on: 'Serious and creative writers of this generation must be free to write about society and its programmes as they see them.' He conceded (as Whitehouse claimed) that contemporary drama tended to concentrate on the tragic side of life and found less inspiration in the admirable side of human behaviour. He admitted that there had been undue sensationalism. But while there were dangers in presenting present day drama, 'it would be much more dangerous not to continue to encourage serious and creative young people'.²⁰

Meanwhile both Greene, and Lord Normanbrook, who succeeded forde as Chairman at the beginning of 1964, refused to see Whitehouse and hoped others in authority would do the same. Normanbrook regretted the decision of the Postmaster - General, Reginald Bevins, to receive a deputation from the Clean-Up Television Campaign, particularly since his own decision to the contrary was known to Bevins.²¹ Whitehouse asked Normanbrook to receive a deputation after the petition bearing 365,555 signatures was presented to Parliament in June 1965. The Board of Management urged him not to and Normanbrook agreed. He said the views expressed

in the petition were so extreme as to exclude a conciliatory response and he told Whitehouse so: 'We welcome constructive criticisms ... but until we have had some opportunity of studying specific suggestions about the kind of programmes of which your supporters would approve I cannot see that we could have a useful discussion.'²² Normanbrook was aware that Lord Hill, Chairman of the Independent Television Authority, had invited Whitehouse to lunch and thought it might be necessary to counter the accusation by her and others that the BBC was too arrogant to listen to complaints from the public. Hill, however, was in a different position, since he was not directly responsible for the production of programmes.²³

During 1965 the Clean-Up TV Campaign was subsumed in the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. Normanbrook was still worried that it had been 'an embarrassment in terms of public relations' for the BBC to have appeared unwilling to listen to the views of some members of the public and hoped that the formation of the NVALA would offer the corporation an opportunity to extricate itself. He had therefore invited John Barnett, the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire and chairman designate of the NVALA, to see him.²⁴ But if Barnett had hoped for a rapprochement he was disappointed. Normanbrook told him there was no evidence that Whitehouse's views were representative of the adherents of the Clean-Up TV Campaign and that if the NVALA was to exercise greater influence it would need to speak with the voice of a representative body.²⁵ The BBC continued to fend off Whitehouse on the two-pronged argument that the NVALA was an undemocratic organisation and not representative of viewers and listeners as a whole.²⁶

The size and composition of the NVALA is difficult to determine. In 1971 Whitehouse claimed it had an individual membership of 11,000 and the support of organisations representing two million people.²⁷ Even so, the BBC was right in asserting that it was not a representative body in the same sense as the British Medical Association or the National Farmers' Union. The *Times* report of the Birmingham Town Hall meeting in 1964 said that 'although men were present, most of the audience were middle-aged women'.²⁸ The NVALA itself, reporting on a meeting in 1968, admitted 'conspicuous gaps in what should be a genuine cross section'. There had been no representatives of the coloured or Jewish communities, or of the trade unions

or the universities.²⁹ An independent attempt to analyse the composition of the NVALA found that most members, including Whitehouse herself, lived in rural rather than industrial areas and the organisation was heavily over-represented by women. The occupational structure was that of the older professions, small businessmen, traders and shopkeepers. A disproportionate number of members were drawn from the clergy and most branches revolved round the Church. Catholics were almost totally absent. The conclusion was that while the NVALA claimed to represent a silent majority, it was a marginal group buttressed against the changing reality of British culture.³⁰

The BBC would have endorsed such a conclusion but it was also concerned about the NVALA connection with Moral Rearmament. Whitehouse agreed that she and Buckland had been associated with MRA for many years but she denied press reports that their campaign had been sponsored, or financially supported, by the organisation.³¹ Adam, however, said it was clear that the campaign was ‘closely associated with Moral Rearmament’³² while according to his biographer, Greene’s eye had been caught by the MRA literature being distributed at the Birmingham meeting and ‘that did it, as far as he was concerned’. In the inter-war years MRA had been thought by many people to have extreme right-wing, and possibly neo-fascists’.³³ As a correspondent in Germany during the 1930s Greene had seen Nazism at first hand and might have recalled that Frank Buchman, MRA’s American founder, was quoted as saying, ‘I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler, who built a front line of defence against the anti-Christ of communism ... think what it would mean to the world if Hitler surrendered to the control of God’.³⁴

References to the implicitly sinister connection between Whitehouse’s campaign and MRA appear frequently in BBC documents. It was even noted that the directors of Blandford Press, publishers of Whitehouse’s first book, were MRA members.³⁵ Apart from the ideological distaste of liberals such as Greene, the BBC’s attitude to MRA was coloured by dealings going back many years. Attempts to mount programmes about MRA repeatedly found the organisation uncooperative and unwilling to submit to independent scrutiny. In the 1950s the BBC invited Buchman to appear on *Press Conference*, a television programme in which he would be questioned by journalists. MRA said it would only agree to a straight talk by Buchman. A radio programme about

MRA was mooted after Buchman's death in 1961. Philip French, a talks producer, was asked to explore the prospects. He met Roland Wilson, a leading member of MRA and a colleague. The two men made it clear 'that they do not consider that there is any tenable view other than their own'. They rejected any criticism of Buchman, the movement and its achievement which they considered to be motivated by ignorance or something more serious, 'such as atheism, communism or homosexuality'. They would refuse to participate in any programme which featured anyone who had gone on record as an opponent.³⁶ The project was abandoned.

In 1964 the radio talks department tried again. Richard Keen, a producer, wrote to Roland Wilson saying they were planning a programme which would represent the opinions of those who were critical of MRA and he hoped MRA would provide facilities to represent its point of view.³⁷ Wilson replied that the last major broadcast by the BBC on MRA had been in 1939 and said that since then there had been many misleading and negative references.³⁸ The matter soon went to the very top of the BBC. Normanbrook wondered whether, if there was no co-operation from MRA, it was worth pursuing the project. If the BBC went ahead 'we must assume the MRA will see to it that there is a row about the programme'.³⁹ The programme was finally broadcast in January 1965 after the BBC, while retaining the material critical of MRA had allowed MRA to have the first and last say. Frank Gillard, Director of Sound Broadcasting, thought that MRA had 'come out of it rather too well for my liking'.⁴⁰ Normanbrook agreed.⁴¹

With the formation of the NVALA Whitehouse's campaign modified its hitherto negative stance, adopting the slogan 'from protest to participation'. Arguing that there was no independent body monitoring BBC standards (it dismissed the General Advisory Council as being BBC-appointed) it urged the setting up of a listeners' and viewers' council on the lines of the Press Council which monitored the standards of newspapers. Although the BBC strongly opposed the idea, arguing that its own internal procedures were rigorous, there was some support in high places. Having initially rejected suggestions for a viewers' council, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Postmaster-General in the 1964 Labour government, later floated the idea of a National Broadcasting Commission (which would oversee ITV as well). Normanbrook told

Edward Short, Benn's successor, that such a body was unnecessary and would be seen as a reflection on the competence of the BBC governors as well as members of the ITA.⁴²

Short, in turn, was reported to be considering a 'public watchdog' on BBC and ITV programmes.⁴³ The main source for the story, however, was Whitehouse herself, based on a letter from Short on which she may have put a favourable interpretation. This was apparently confirmed when a White Paper was published in December 1966, ruling out 'the establishment of additional machinery for the oversight of the conduct of broadcasting services'.⁴² In the same month Normanbrook met the MP James Dance. According to Whitehouse, Normanbrook had told Dance he favoured a viewers' council and suggested that Whitehouse herself might organise it.⁴⁵ The BBC rejected this version of events and took the unusual step of releasing Normanbrook's confidential notes of the meeting. In them he repeated the BBC's position that if the NVALA could show that it was democratically organised and more representative of viewers the corporation would be more inclined to listen to it.⁴⁶

Whitehouse's other significant change of policy was moving away from blanket condemnation of the BBC and singling out programmes of which she approved, making a point of writing to the BBC and saying so. When she and the NVALA moved a stage further and instituted an annual award for best family viewing programme the BBC found itself in an embarrassing situation. The first award was given in 1967 to *Dixon of Dock Green* in recognition of what it had done to build 'confidence in the police, understanding of their difficulties and a sound relationship between the police force and the public'.⁴⁷ Greene's reaction was that no member of the BBC staff should associate themselves with the awards and if possible Jack Warner (the star of *Dixon*) should be discouraged also.⁵⁰ Greene's ruling was quickly undermined. First, Warner had already agreed to receive the award at an NVALA lunch in London. He wrote to Whitehouse to say he was 'thrilled' that *Dixon* had been honoured and said he would put Whitehouse's letter in his scrapbook 'of happy memories for this very especial occasion'.⁴⁹ Secondly, the BBC was involved in a libel action with Whitehouse over remarks made by Johnny Speight in a radio programme and on advice from its solicitor

was having to tread carefully. To boycott the award might aggravate matters. The Board of Management (in the absence of Greene, who was abroad) decided that the BBC should not prevent anybody from attending the NVALA lunch. But they should not be involved in any controversial matters and confine themselves, if called upon to speak, to saying 'thank you'.⁵⁰

From the start Whitehouse was criticised for concentrating her fire on the BBC. The original Clean-Up TV Campaign manifesto, and the petition presented to Parliament, had not mentioned ITV. For the critic Peter Black the campaign's 'absurd overemphasis on BBC programmes - and a tiny handful of them - and its silence about the hours of mindless trivia on ITV' exposed its essentially false position.⁵¹ Philip Purser accused Whitehouse of being blind to the violence peddled by American film series shown on ITV.⁵² Whitehouse denied that she ignored ITV but said that what had most disturbed her, and inspired her campaign, were the BBC's drama productions and programmes such as *Meeting Point* which had overemphasised the New Morality. She also contrasted the reaction of the ITA and BBC towards her criticisms. From the ITA she had received nothing but courtesy while her experience with the BBC had been the reverse. Finally, she regarded the BBC as part of the national life, stemming from gratitude for what the corporation had done for the country during the war.⁵³

Whitehouse was right to say that she did not ignore ITV. In December 1964 she wrote to Hill, the ITA Chairman, to complain about a forthcoming Granada documentary containing a sequence in a strip club, saying that 'behaviour which sets out to be provocative' would 'worsen the present trend towards promiscuity and the resultant venereal disease'.⁵⁴ Whitehouse was also correct that she got a better hearing from the ITA. In June 1965 she had lunch with Hill and members of the ITA and was invited to speak to them afterwards. It was 'an opportunity and a privilege I greatly appreciated'⁵⁵ though this did not stop her criticising ITV programmes. In July 1967 she listed three complaints, about material used by the comedian Bob Monkhouse, 'sadism' in the drama series *Callan* and the showing of the cinema film, *A Kind of Loving*. Hill's reply was detailed, courteous and honest. He said *A Kind of Loving* had been seen by a panel of five married couples all with children and they had recommended that, with slight editing, the film was suitable for transmission at 8pm. 'A

conscientious decision was made in this case. I must uphold it, even though I cannot ... declare with absolute conviction that this was right'.⁵⁶ His use of the first person suggests that he had written the letter himself rather than, as was common practice, signing a draft prepared by his staff. It was a personal touch which Whitehouse would surely have welcomed.

Unlike Greene and Normanbrook, Hill was prepared to talk to Whitehouse but as an experienced former politician he knew how to persuade opponents that he was sympathetic to their case while conceding nothing. In May 1967 a national newspaper carried the headline 'ITA Chief Encourages "Clean Up TV" Body' over a report based on a letter from Hill to Whitehouse.⁵⁷ Whitehouse may have been encouraged but Hill made no promises beyond saying that the ITA was always ready to hear her organisation's views and give them careful consideration.⁵⁸ Effectively he was repeating a previous letter: 'I assure you that we will continue to listen ... to the views of your association. But that cannot mean that we will always agree with you!'.⁵⁹ Hill continued the same approach, conciliatory in manner but firm on substance, when he became BBC Chairman. In November 1967, two months after taking office, he met Whitehouse and other members of the NVALA to discuss their case for a viewers' council. Having been snubbed by Greene and Normanbrook she was pleased to get a BBC hearing at last but Hill merely repeated that her organisation was entitled to have its views considered.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Whitehouse and her followers were unreconstructed Christians who saw their beliefs being systematically undermined, particularly by television. They were dismayed that television, by which they mainly meant the BBC, seemed to be encouraging what they termed the New Morality and they wanted programmes to return to traditional Christian values. This brought them into direct conflict with the BBC which, under a liberal Director-General, and in line with the spirit of the times, backed experiment in drama, the questioning of established institutions and the open and non-moralistic discussion of sexual behaviour and other social issues. That the Clean-Up TV Campaign and the NVALA secured such prominence in public debate, despite being a minority movement

out of step with prevailing attitudes, was largely due to Whitehouse's tireless campaigning.

Her effect on what was shown on the screen, both during the 1960s and later, was minimal. Television was moving the other way as the boundaries of public acceptance widened. Her more general campaign, for an outside body to scrutinise the BBC, attracted wider support. In 1971 the corporation itself set up an Independent Programmes Commission to consider complaints from people who felt they had been unfairly treated, though the members were BBC nominees. It was eventually superseded by a genuinely independent body, the Broadcasting Standards Council (1988). The first chairman, Lord Rees-Mogg, attributed its existence, at least in part, to Whitehouse.

Notes

The archives of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVALA) are held at The Albert Sloman Library, University of Essex.

1. Quoted in Max Caulfield, *Mary Whitehouse* (London and Oxford: A. R. Mowbray, 1975), p 171.
2. Michael Tracey and David Morrison, *Whitehouse* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1979), p 53. An earlier version, an unpublished typescript called *The Jericho People: Mary Whitehouse and the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association*, is in the British Film Institute Library.
3. Whitehouse, *'Who Does She Think She Is?'* (revised ed, London: New English Library, 1972), p 25.
4. Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV* (London: Blandford Press, 1967), pp 217-221.
Although it had a strict code on violence, the BBC was guided by the findings of research studies that there was no simple link between what was shown on television and violent behaviour. In 1969 Hill, by no means a libertarian, said it seemed to be accepted that at most some disturbed people were encouraged in dispositions they already had by what they saw on the screen. BBC WAC R1/37/1: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 8 May 1969.

5. Ibid, p 16.
6. BBC WAC T16/585: Whitehouse to Newman, 25 August 1966. The play was originally transmitted on 12 January 1966. Whitehouse was referring to the repeat on 24 August.
7. BBC WAC T16/585: Newman to Whitehouse, 5 September 1966.
8. *The Guardian*, 10 April 1968.
9. NVALA Archives Box 37: Kenneth Lamb, BBC Secretary, to Whitehouse, 20 June 1967.
10. Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), p 231.
11. Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV*, op cit, pp 18-19.
12. Ibid, p 23.
13. Ibid, p 24.
14. BBC WAC T16/585: Doreen Stephens to Huw Wheldon, 4 May 1964.
15. Ibid: Kenneth Bird, Information Officer, Midland Region, to Controller, Midland Region, 6 May 1964.
16. *The Times*, 6 May 1964.
17. BBC WAC T16/585: Controllers Meeting, 12 May 1964.
18. BBC WAC R1/32/2: Board of Governors Minutes, 16 July 1964.
19. *Church of England Newspaper*, 7 August 1964.
20. Ibid. Adam was quoting from a transcript of remarks, which he was 'tired of seeing misquoted', made a press conference in Glasgow .
21. BBC WAC R1/32/2: Board of Governors Minutes, 30 July 1964.
22. NVALA Archives, Box 42: Normanbrook to Whitehouse, 21 June 1965.
23. BBC WAC R1/33/2: Board of Governors Minutes, 23 June 1965.
24. BBC WAC R1/34/1: Board of Governors Minutes, 14 April 1966.
25. Ibid: 28 April 1966.
26. NVALA Archives Box 37: Kenneth Lamb, BBC Secretary, to Whitehouse, 14 October 1968.
27. Whitehouse, 'Who Does She Think She Is?', op cit, p 9.
28. *The Times*, 5 May 1964.

29. NVALA Archives Box 44: NVALA meeting at the House of Commons, 26 March 1968.
30. NVALA Archives Box 76: Draft chapters of *Opposition to the Age: A Study of the NVALA*, 1976, by Tracey and Morrison. This was planned as a companion volume to *Whitehouse* but seems not to have got beyond the drafts.
31. Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV*, op cit, p 31.
32. BBC WAC T16/585: Controllers Meeting, 12 May 1964.
33. Tracey, *A Variety of Lives*, op cit, p 231.
34. Tracey and Morrison, *Whitehouse*, op cit, p 60.
35. BBC WAC T16/585: News and Current Affairs meeting, 21 January 1967.
36. BBC WAC R34/801/3: Philip French to Janet Quigley, Assistant Head of Talks (Sound), 29 September 1961.
37. BBC WAC R78/1412/1: Richard Keen to Roland Wilson, 23 April 1964.
38. Ibid: Wilson to Keen, 28 April 1964.
39. Ibid: Normanbrook to Greene, 1 July 1964.
40. Ibid: Gillard to Greene, 4 January, 1965.
41. Ibid: Normanbrook to Greene, 4 January 1965.
42. BBC WAC R1/34/2: Board of Governors Minutes, 23 June 1966.
43. *Daily Telegraph*, 8 August 1966.
44. Cmnd. 3169, *Broadcasting*, paragraph 49.
45. Whitehouse, 'Who Does She Think She Is?', op cit, p 155-56.
46. *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1971.
47. NVALA Archives Box 10: Annual Award.
48. BBC WAC T16/699: Controllers Meeting, 23 May 1967.
49. NVALA Archives Box 10: Warner to Whitehouse, 19 May 1967.
50. BBC WAC T16/699: Adam to Wheldon, Controller of Programmes, Television, 5 June 1967.
51. *Daily Mail*, 23 October 1965.
52. *Sunday Telegraph*, 29 May 1977.
53. Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV*, op cit, p 33.
54. NVALA Archives Box 47: Whitehouse to Hill, 31 December 1964. The ITA ordered Granada to cut the nude scenes. The company refused, sat on the

programme for nine months, resubmitted it unchanged and it was passed for transmission.

55. Whitehouse, *Cleaning Up TV*, op cit, p 56.

56. NVALA Archives Box 47: Hill to Whitehouse, 25 July 1967.

57. *Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1967.

58. NVALA Archives Box 47: Hill to Whitehouse, 2 May 1967.

59. Ibid: Hill to Whitehouse, 11 January 1967.

60. Whitehouse, 'Who Does She Think She Is?', op cit, p 156; Hill, *Behind the Screen: The Broadcasting Memoirs of Lord Hill of Luton* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974), pp 79-80.

2. HAROLD WILSON AND THE BROADCASTING OF POLITICS

Introduction

Hugh Greene's BBC and Harold Wilson's project for Britain can both be seen as attempts to capture the mood of the 1960s. Greene wanted to throw off the BBC's reputation for being stuffy and out of touch and engage with a society which was becoming more libertarian and less deferential. Wilson, too, was a moderniser anxious to respond to the changing times, emphasising merit rather than privilege, the harnessing of technology and doing away with outdated practices in management and labour. The fullest expression of this was his speech to the Labour Party Conference at Scarborough on 1 October 1963, in which he spoke of 'the white heat' of a second industrial revolution.¹ Television was part of the fast developing technology but here the comparison breaks down. Wilson saw the medium as central to political success and was keen to use it for these ends. Greene was determined to assert and maintain the BBC's journalistic independence. The first part of this section charts the origins and development of the conflict, from Wilson's election as Labour leader to the general election of 1966. The second examines the impact of Wilson's appointment of Lord Hill as BBC Chairman, a move widely seen as an attempt to discipline the corporation in general and Greene in particular.

The making of a feud, 1963-66

Wilson was the first British Prime Minister positively to embrace television and seek to exploit its potential for political advantage. Partly this stemmed from his relative youth. He was only 46 when elected leader of the Labour Party in 1963 and when he became Prime Minister a year later he was then the youngest of the century. His predecessors, Harold Macmillan and Sir Alec Douglas-Home, were well into their sixties when they became premier. Macmillan tried to come to terms with television and became an adept performer. Douglas-Home, who had had little experience of television and hated appearing on it, struggled to make an impact. Wilson, on the other hand, exploited the medium with great skill. He was one of the first political figures to master the autocue. In interviews he drew on his prodigious memory to pull out a telling fact or refute an argument. Taking his cue from John F. Kennedy in the United States, he would depart

from a set speech when he knew the cameras were on him and switch to a well-prepared soundbite that would fit neatly into a news bulletin. The BBC disliked surrendering its editorial control and retaliated by refusing to take live relays from meetings during the 1966 general election.² Wilson exploited the contrast with Macmillan and Douglas-Home not only on age but social class. He portrayed them as aristocrats, remote from the concerns of ordinary citizens, while he, from a lower middle-class background, constructed himself as a man of the people. He was seldom seen on screen without his homely pipe, though in private he preferred to smoke cigars. He set out to engage with the popular culture of the period by appearing with the Beatles, Morecambe and Wise and Mike Yarwood.

Wilson was determined to use television not least because he saw it as a counterbalance to a mostly hostile press. Labour had long felt that newspapers, and their right-wing proprietors, were unfairly ranged against it though the effect of this may have been exaggerated. At the time of the general election in October 1964 which brought Wilson to power, the combined readerships of the four national dailies supporting the Conservative Party (*Express*, *Mail*, *Sketch* and *Telegraph*) were estimated at 24.4 million. The Labour-supporting papers, the *Mirror*, *Sun* (which had recently replaced the Labour *Herald*) and *Guardian* had a total readership of just under 20 million. More pertinent was that 40% of *Express* readers voted Labour, 33% of *Mail* readers and 49% of *Sketch* readers. A much smaller minority of *Mirror* and *Sun* readers (22% and 13%) voted Conservative.³ This suggests that the bias in the press against Labour was not only less than party activists claimed but that a significant number of readers of Conservative papers took no notice of their politics. Labour's perception of unfairness, however, remained and it was at the heart of one of Wilson's early brushes with the BBC.

That the subject of Wilson's complaint was seemingly trivial underlines his extreme sensitivity towards broadcasting. *From Today's Papers* was a five-minute digest of the national daily press broadcast within the *Today* programme on radio's Home Service at 7.45am and 8.40am. During October 1964 the earlier broadcast attracted some 2 million listeners and the later one around half that. These were modest audiences. The total United Kingdom population, excluding children under five, was 49 million.⁴ Moreover, three-quarters of the items in a typical programme were non-

political. Wilson, however, saw *From Today's Papers* as damaging to Labour's chances and wrote to Greene in March 1964, citing several examples of 'bias' in recent editions and going on: 'I feel very strongly that to continue this programme in the election will lead to propagation of inevitably biased material'.⁵ Greene promised that in the election period they would aim at 'some sort of balance', though this might be artificial and undesirable in normal times. But to suppress the programme entirely would be a dereliction of the BBC's duty to reflect the election campaign.⁶ Labour was not appeased and the matter was pursued by Herbert Bowden, the Chief Whip.

Greene stood firm. He pointed out that the programme had run throughout the 1959 election period without complaint. If they dropped it they would have to make a public statement of the reasons that was unlikely to reflect credit either on the BBC or the Labour Party.⁷ Bowden rejected Greene's arguments and enclosed an extract from a recent programme 'which, I think you will agree, is heavily weighted against the Labour Party'. But he was not now asking for the programme to be withdrawn, only the political portion of it.⁸ Eventually the matter went to the Board of Governors, who supported Greene, and Lord Normanbrook, the Chairman, wrote to Wilson: 'To discontinue during the election period that part of the programme concerned with political news would amount to a public admission that the BBC had no confidence in its ability ... to report political news with impartiality.' However, those responsible for preparing the programme would be reminded of the special importance of ensuring that its political content was impartially selected and presented.⁹ Wilson was unconvinced, making a scribbled note on Normanbrook's letter: 'Not enough, because the raw material is unbalanced. We want it in writing that the finished product will be six of one and half a dozen of the other'.¹⁰ The BBC did not back down.

Besides demonstrating Wilson's sensitivity, the episode also shows the BBC determined not to bow to political pressure. But the BBC's assertion of journalistic independence was only part of a retreat from a timid attitude among broadcasters over covering political events. The 14-Day Rule, which prohibited discussion of topics due to be debated in Parliament within the next two weeks, was abandoned in 1956. Until 1958 television had never covered a by-election, partly for fear that it might fall foul of the Representation of the People Act. Granada decided to test this at Rochdale and no

legal action followed. The way was clear to covering general elections on which hitherto the BBC had been silent from the time Parliament was dissolved until after the polls closed. The 1959 campaign was the first to feature on television. At the same time the quantity of political coverage, through current affairs programmes such as *Panorama*, had greatly increased. This gave politicians more opportunities for exposure on television, which Wilson was eager to seize, aware that by the early 1960s 90% of British homes had television sets. On the hustings he could reach a few hundred people, but on television millions. This could, however, prove double-edged.

In the first place the wider coverage of politics shifted control from the politicians to the broadcasters. As Wilson was to discover, even as Prime Minister he could not guarantee himself an appearance on *Panorama*. The broadcasters, too, were increasingly setting agendas. During the 1966 general election Labour complained that the BBC was focusing on issues such as the Common Market and trade union reform, which were running well for the Conservative Opposition. Unsurprisingly the parties were determined to hold on to their party political broadcasts, over which they had complete control, in face of attempts by the BBC and ITV to cut them back.

Secondly, television journalism was moving away from its previous reticence and the questioning of political figures became more penetrating and persistent. One of the pioneers was Robin Day, initially at ITV before moving to the BBC in 1959. Other interviewers, such as the political scientist Robert McKenzie, though less flamboyant were no less searching. Greene, himself a journalist, defended this trend: 'We have become more outspoken and freer in our handling of controversial political and social subjects. We think it is an important part of our duty to inquire, to question authority rather than accept it, to ask in fact whether the Emperor has any clothes. I have no doubt that strong institutions flourish in an atmosphere of free public discussion and criticism.'¹¹

Although Wilson's main quarrel over the years was with the BBC, and not ITV, it did not start that way. In February 1963 the Labour Party elected Wilson leader after the death of Hugh Gaitskell. Milton Shulman (later a television critic) was producing a fortnightly political programme, *Decision*, for the ITV company, Associated-Rediffusion. He planned to devote an edition to the new leader. Shulman chose four MPs and three journalists to give their appraisals of Wilson. The MPs covered the

political spectrum and although the journalists were broadly from the right Shulman felt that any bias would be more than offset by a planned interview with Wilson himself. The programme would end with a short discussion between two MPs, Barbara Castle for Labour and the Conservative Charles Curran (not to be confused with his BBC namesake). Labour immediately lodged objections to the journalists, particularly Bernard Levin who had been an outspoken critic of Wilson. Labour insisted that an objective political correspondent, such as David Wood of *The Times*, should be brought in to correct the balance.¹² Shulman agreed but rejected a further request to include a left-wing journalist, John Beavan.

On the day Wilson was due to record his interview he announced he would not be coming and demanded to see Rediffusion's General Manager, Captain Tom Brownrigg. Wilson began by objecting to Levin but was also unhappy about the choice of Castle, saying that other Labour MPs would be more appropriate. Shulman suspected that because Wilson was trying to ingratiate himself with the centre and right of the Labour Party, the appearance of Castle, a left-winger, might not be welcome. Rediffusion agreed to drop the Castle-Curran section and substitute, as Wilson had suggested, a discussion between two more journalists. Levin apart, Wilson had essentially got his way and after the programme was transmitted, on 17 July 1963, he wrote to Shulman in almost triumphalist terms. He regretted the difficulties that had arisen in the early stages 'but I am sure that the changes made after the discussions had a lot to do with the programme's success'.¹³

The episode shows that even early in his leadership Wilson was determined to influence the shape and content of a television programme to his advantage. It also suggests that ITV, far more than the BBC, was willing to bow to such pressure. Shulman saw the contrast as follows: 'The BBC ... had a cherished tradition of independence from governmental influence. The commercial companies - smaller, more concerned with profits than principles, eager for a quiet life - tended to be more amenable and sensitive to politicians' complaints.'¹⁴ Wilson continued to find ITV amenable after he became Prime Minister. In July 1965 he complained to the Independent Television Authority about the use of Labour left-wingers in *Division*. Lord Hill, the ITA Chairman, made 'tactful concessions' which 'sweetened the

atmosphere'.¹⁵ But Wilson's favourable attitude towards ITV went deeper than a perceived ability to win concessions. Labour, including Wilson, had been ideologically opposed to ITV, arguing that its commercial status would undermine the British tradition of public service broadcasting. But as ITV developed, its wide appeal could not be disputed, particularly among working-class audiences from which Labour drew much of its support. As a new Television Bill was being discussed in 1963, 'Labour under the pragmatic leadership of Harold Wilson, was not going to fritter away their appeal to floating voters by a display of doctrinaire attitudes towards a popular television service'.¹⁶

There was a further consideration. From the start ITV's obligations on such matters as taste, balance and impartiality had been set out in an Act of Parliament. The BBC had similar obligations, but they were self-imposed. Political impartiality, for instance, was not laid down in the Charter or in its Licence to broadcast. The only written statement of it was in the Postmaster-General's standing instructions to the BBC in which he relied on the corporation to treat 'controversial subjects with complete impartiality'.¹⁷ In some respects the requirements on ITV went further. Section 3 of the 1954 Television Act prohibited the 'offensive representation of living persons'. Stuart Hood, a programme controller at both the BBC and ITV in the 1960s, argued that this would have prevented ITV mounting a programme such as *That Was the Week That Was*.¹⁸ Labour seized on the different ways the BBC and ITV were regulated to support its criticisms of the corporation and although it initially attacked the appointment of Hill, a former Conservative Cabinet Minister, to the ITA, it came to appreciate his strong leadership.

While Wilson continued to have complaints about ITV his main attacks were directed at the BBC. One area which soured relations between them was confrontations. Broadcasters in Britain had watched with interest the television debates between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy during the American Presidential campaign in 1960. With a general election approaching, Grace Wyndham Goldie, who was responsible for political broadcasting at the BBC, suggested similar 'confrontations' between the party leaders. In a paper sent to Greene, she proposed two debates, each of 45 to 60 minutes, and said the attraction for the parties was the likelihood of a greatly

increased audience compared with a party election broadcast.¹⁹ Wilson, at least, seemed to be in favour. A few months earlier he had intimated to the BBC that he was willing to confront Macmillan, the Prime Minister, on television.²⁰ When Greene met the parties, however, he found they preferred an 'election forum', in which party leaders appeared individually to answer questions from journalists. Labour, though, was keener on confrontations than the Conservatives.²¹

At a further meeting between the BBC and the parties Wilson again favoured a confrontation but by February 1964 the idea had finally been rejected by the Conservatives. Selwyn Lloyd, for the government, said they were opposed in principle, arguing that presidential type programmes were inappropriate in the context of party elections.²² Wilson's attitude had been equivocal. Publicly he supported confrontations and with Douglas-Home, an indifferent television performer now Prime Minister, must have fancied his chances. Privately he had doubts, fearing that one slip before a large television audience, such as getting hiccups from smoking a dusty pipe, might damage him.²³ Wilson was happy for Douglas-Home to be seen to have rejected the idea while secretly relieved that he had done so.

In the approach to the 1966 election the roles were reversed. Wilson as Prime Minister was reluctant to be involved in a confrontation because he felt it would give equality to Edward Heath, the Conservative leader. Heath, understandably, was keen on the idea. So was Paul Fox, Head of the Current Affairs Group at the BBC. Greene was lukewarm, saying that on the basis of past experience he would not be prepared to pursue it.²⁴ The general election date was announced on 28 February and two days later John Grist, Fox's deputy, sounded out Wilson on confrontations, saying he had been asked to do so 'on behalf of the BBC'. Wilson said he was happy, as long as Jo Grimond (the Liberal leader) was involved, but Heath should take the first step.²⁵

Grist also approached Heath and two days later Heath wrote to Wilson inviting him to a television debate. Wilson pointed out that in 1964 it was he who had suggested a confrontation and the Conservatives who had refused it. He did, however, say he would be willing to appear with Heath and Grimond.²⁶ Heath then proposed that the programme should replace the final party political broadcast. As this had been the

prerogative of the Prime Minister in previous elections, Wilson said 'you would hardly expect me to give it up'.²⁷ Heath wrote again, accusing Wilson of procrastinating. Wilson's reply was to accuse Heath of urging the confrontations as a 'last minute stunt' which if it was meant as a serious contribution should have been put forward during meetings between the parties and the broadcasting authorities to plan the election broadcasts. But he was still willing to appear with Heath and Grimond.²⁸ On 21 March, with no agreement reached and the election only ten days away, Grist tried again, suggesting a programme divided into two parts. The first would have the three main party leaders, the second Wilson and Heath. Wilson's reaction was to accuse the BBC, as in 1964, of following the wishes of the Conservative leaders.²⁹

Wilson's allegation that the BBC had tried to push him into confrontations became one of his main grievances against the corporation, though the complaint was made not to the BBC directly but through the press. *The Guardian* reported that Wilson and Labour Party officials had been 'infuriated' by the BBC's handling of the issue by 'putting up a variety of formulae for a Heath-Wilson confrontation long after the Prime Minister had made it clear he had no intention of agreeing to the idea'. That was in contrast to the 1964 election when the BBC had accepted Douglas-Home's refusal to meet Wilson on television.³⁰ It was partly in response to such newspaper reports that Oliver Whitley, Greene's deputy, set out a chronology of events as the BBC saw them. Rejecting the suggestion that the BBC put up 'a variety of formulae' for a confrontation, he referred only to Grist's initiative of 21 March (and did not mention Grist's earlier feelers). He said that the BBC had wanted to keep off the subject but was forced to act because of Wilson's acceptance, in a speech on 18 March, of an offer of confrontation time from ITV. Whitley commented: 'The possibility of being pipped by ITV's slipshod opportunism and of the Prime Minister being able to say, "Well, that was the only specific offer I had", is not comforting.'³¹ Whitley added that if Wilson had 'made it clear that he had no intention of agreeing to the idea' this had not been conveyed to the BBC.

What Whitley did not touch on is the different degrees of enthusiasm for confrontations within the BBC. This was admitted by Normanbrook when he met Wilson privately after the election. He confirmed that at senior level the BBC attitude

was that confrontations were a matter for decision between the parties and if they could agree the BBC would provide the facilities. But he admitted that at lower levels within the BBC there was a more active desire to promote such a programme and he mentioned, though not by name (it was probably Grist) a member of the Current Affairs Group. But he was satisfied that any pressure to get such a programme accepted was due to an excess of professional zeal (because it was thought it would make a good piece of broadcasting) and was not proof of pro-Tory bias.³²

Apart from the difference over *From Today's Papers* relations between Wilson and the BBC over coverage of the 1964 election had been good. They were helped by a concession which he managed to obtain, informally and without publicity, from Greene. Wilson had seen the BBC's programme schedule for election night and noted that *Steptoe and Son*, one of the BBC's most popular programmes albeit a repeat, was down for 7.30pm. Wilson accused the BBC of breaching an agreement between the broadcasting organisations and the parties that no 'glamorous' programmes would go out on election day before the polls closed to discourage voters. Wilson argued that *Steptoe* appealed particularly to Labour supporters. Harman Grisewood, Greene's chief assistant, rejected the complaint but Wilson was not satisfied. Greene invited Wilson to his house and promised to think again, conceding it might be against the spirit of the agreement. The next day Donald Baverstock, Controller of BBC1, suggested a way out. If *Steptoe* was scheduled at 9pm, immediately after the polls closed, this would guarantee the BBC a large audience as it moved towards its election coverage. In thanking Greene, Wilson said it might be worth a dozen seats.³³ Labour's overall majority was four.

But with the election over Wilson, battling with his tiny majority and an economic crisis, began to see the BBC ranged against him. Within a month George Wigg, the Paymaster General, whose brief was to keep an eye on broadcasters, complained about 'imbalance' in an edition of *Panorama* on the bank rate. He rang the BBC to request a transcript by 10am the next day and phoned Richard Francis, the programme's producer, at home. Paul Fox, the executive responsible for *Panorama*, rejected Wigg's charge, pointing out that not only George Brown and James Callaghan but Wilson himself had been asked to appear on the programme and declined and that the MPs who did appear were 'a perfectly balanced team'.³⁴ Greene wrote a sharp letter to

Herbert Bowden, Lord President of the Council, complaining about Wigg's behaviour and reminding him of the long-standing arrangement that the Chief Whip should provide the channel of communication between the government and the BBC.³⁵

A more serious issue between the Wilson government and the BBC was ministerial broadcasts. On 16 September 1965 the government was due to publish its National Plan, an ambitious blueprint for future economic growth. Bowden approached the BBC to ask whether George Brown, First Secretary of State at the Department of Economic Affairs, could broadcast on the day of publication. He said the government regarded the probable content as of a non-controversial national character. Greene agreed to Brown's broadcast but also acceded to the Opposition's request for the right of reply. Supporting Greene, Normanbrook conceded that Brown's broadcast had been non-controversial in tone but argued that the subject itself was contentious in the current political situation. But he saw the episode as an example of the invidious position in which the BBC was placed as an honest broker between the parties.³⁶

The government's view was set out by Bowden in a letter to Greene which had been approved by Wilson and to which the Prime Minister had added the sentence: 'The government must now call in question the BBC's handling of ministerial and political matters and in particular the difference in treatment between the late government and the present one.' Bowden argued that the National Plan was a matter of vital importance to the country as a whole and should be removed from the arena of party politics. Its publication, therefore, should not give rise to an automatic right of reply. Although he accepted that it was for the BBC to decide, it had granted this right before it had heard Brown's broadcast and been able to judge its tone. Bowden complained that the Conservative reply by Iain Macleod on 17 September had been little more than a party political broadcast, parts of which were 'highly slanted'.³⁷

Ministerial broadcasts had started in radio and were governed by an aide-mémoire drawn up in 1947. They were intended to cover purely factual matters, explanations of measures approved by Parliament or national appeals, for instance on saving fuel. Ministers making such broadcasts had to be as impartial as possible. But if the Opposition thought that a government broadcast was controversial it could ask for a right to reply. If no agreement could be reached, the BBC made the final decision.³⁸

Mostly the system worked smoothly, the notable exception being the Suez crisis of 1956. The country was divided over sending troops to Egypt and when the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, made a ministerial broadcast on 31 October, the BBC overruled Conservative objections and allowed Hugh Gaitskell, the leader of the Opposition, the chance to reply. This was rare. There were 91 ministerial broadcasts during the Conservative governments of 1951 to 1964 and in only three cases was a right of reply requested.

After becoming Director-General Greene devised a system subtly different from ministerial broadcasts in that the BBC would take the initiative and be in control throughout. The corporation would issue 'invitations' to political leaders to speak to the nation on matters it considered to be of national importance. The BBC alone would decide whether there should be a right of reply.³⁹ In practice the 'invitation' system amounted to much the same thing and could cause just as much trouble. Although the initiative had come from the government Brown's broadcast was not a 'ministerial' but made under the invitation procedure, the first time it had been used for a minister other than the Prime Minister.

On 29 September Derek Mitchell, Wilson's principal private secretary, saw Normanbrook. According to Mitchell, Normanbrook admitted to him that the BBC had been wrong over the National Plan. If Brown's talk had been a ministerial broadcast and the Opposition had asked for a right of reply the BBC would have been bound to refuse it, for the broadcast had been explanatory, restrained and free from polemic.⁴⁰ Greene, however, defended the decision to give the Opposition the right of reply and said the BBC could not be held responsible for the tone of Macleod's broadcast, which would have been different from Brown's whether the right of reply had been granted before Brown spoke, as happened, or after.⁴¹ Interestingly Downing Street's anger was not shared by Wilson's Cabinet colleague, Richard Crossman, an expert on political propaganda.⁴² He thought Heath had made a mistake by denouncing the National Plan as a gimmick before he had read it and by putting Macleod on to reply to Brown with a 'purely vindictive speech'.⁴³

The row over the National Plan broadcast was compounded by two incidents at the Labour Party Conference in Blackpool in September 1965. The first was Wilson's

objection to a BBC interview with the trade union leader, Clive Jenkins, a left-winger critical of the government's incomes policy. Wilson had sharp words with Grist, who was in charge of BBC coverage, complaining that as Jenkins had not taken part in that day's proceedings, he had no place in a conference report. The story was leaked and led the *Daily Mail* under the headline 'Wilson protests to the BBC'.⁴⁴ Three days later George Brown was interviewed by Robin Day who ruffled Brown by slipping in a question about immigration. Again Wilson made his displeasure known to Grist.

By the time the general election was held the following March Wilson had accumulated a formidable list of grievances against the BBC, over the National Plan broadcast, coverage of the party conference, confrontations and the allegation that BBC current affairs programmes had been highlighting issues favourable to the Conservatives. Wilson also objected to being addressed in BBC programmes as 'leader of the Labour Party' instead of 'Prime Minister'. The BBC pointed out that it had adopted the same policy towards Douglas-Home in 1964.⁴⁵ On the day after the election Wilson snubbed the BBC on the train which took him back to London. The BBC had converted one of the coaches into a mobile studio in order to carry a live interview. Wilson spoke to ITV instead. Labour subsequently claimed that Wilson's refusal to talk to the BBC was because he knew nothing about the interview beyond what he had read in the press. In a letter to *The Times*, the party's general secretary, Len Williams, said the Prime Minister must be free to decline any election or post-election interview where he regarded the arrangements as inconvenient or the preliminaries unsatisfactory.⁴⁶ The letter was drafted by Gerald Kaufman, Wilson's Parliamentary Press Liaison Officer, who may have been disingenuous. Paul Fox had written to Wilson on 17 March suggesting interviews 'during the night of 31 March and the day of 1 April' and Kaufman had replied on Wilson's behalf, saying the Prime Minister had not yet decided but suggested getting back in touch nearer the end of the campaign.⁴⁷ According to the BBC, Stanley Hyland, a current affairs executive who had worked closely with Wilson, broached the train interview on 29 March, 30 March and 31 March. It was only late in the night of 31 March that Wilson declared that 'I have severed relations with the BBC'.⁴⁸

Although Labour was unhappy about the election coverage, it made no official

complaint to the BBC. Instead it appeared to be using the press. On the Sunday after the election the *Sunday Times* carried two pieces, neither of which could have been written without help from Labour sources. One was a background feature, setting out in detail 'how Wilson's BBC vendetta built up'. The other was a front page news story headed 'Wilson wants BBC watchdog' and reporting that the government was looking to impose greater accountability over the corporation, similar to that exercised over commercial television by Lord Hill. The story, which had all the hallmarks of a briefing from senior Labour figures, spoke of a plan 'to impose a strong man over the BBC'.⁴⁹ This uncannily anticipates Wilson's decision to switch Hill from the ITA to the BBC.

In the absence of a direct complaint from the government, the BBC carried out its own inquiry. Donald Edwards, Editor of News and Current Affairs, set out Labour's allegations, as reported in the press, and the BBC's response, in a dossier running to six pages.⁵⁰ The Board discussed the dossier at length, decided that the BBC had not been seriously at fault and agreed not to make any statement to the press.⁵¹ Kenneth Adam, Director of Television, said Edwards's report showed that the incidents which had caused Wilson's irritation were of 'minimal and peripheral importance'. It had therefore been agreed that the 'alleged' dispute should be allowed to sink into oblivion. Greene had, however, ruled that any future approaches to the Prime Minister, or Heath, should be referred through Edwards and Whitley to him.⁵² On 15 April Greene and Normanbrook met Wilson at his request at 10 Downing Street. Wilson outlined a number of complaints against the BBC, of which the main one was confrontations. It was because he felt that the BBC had kept the issue alive throughout the election campaign that he had decided to 'break off relations' and refuse the train journey interview on 1 April.⁵³

Wilson's revenge? 'Rommel takes over the Eighth Army'

After the 1966 election relations between the Labour government and the BBC remained cool, but did not noticeably worsen. Then on 15 June 1967 Normanbrook died. The BBC Chairman was appointed by the Prime Minister and on 26 July it was announced that Lord Hill was moving from the ITA to take Normanbrook's place. The move was received with dismay in the BBC. Greene was horrified at the news and said:

‘How can I work for a man for whom I have the utmost contempt?’ Hill, he contended, did not have the intellect or character he had been used to in a chairman of the BBC. Greene considered resigning immediately but was persuaded by Whitley and Robert Lusty, the Vice-Chairman, to sleep on it.⁵⁴ If Greene’s dislike of Hill was personal there was resentment among other BBC managers that the new chairman had been in charge of their main rival, with an ethos of broadcasting based on profit not public service. Hence the metaphor, for which credit was claimed by both Lusty and David Attenborough, that it was like putting Rommel in charge of the Eighth Army.

It is impossible to know what went on in Wilson’s mind though there is evidence that he saw Hill as a strong man who would bring discipline to the BBC and hasten the departure of Greene. This, at least, was Crossman’s interpretation. In his diary entry for 25 July, the day before the appointment was announced, he called it:

the most characteristic piece of Wilsonian gimmickry he has yet achieved. Hill has very much run ITV to suit the convenience of the politicians and in particular he has made sure that their treatment of news and current affairs and discussions does not offend the establishment, including the leaders of the two big parties. He has carefully avoided all the irritating things the BBC do. Of course, as a public service the BBC is determined to show itself independent and sometimes unaccommodating and this tendency has been strengthened by Hugh Greene’s new style directorship and the desire to compete with ITV and to be newsier, edgier and more exciting. So Harold has coolly switched Hill to the BBC to discipline it and bring it to book and, above all, to deal with Hugh Greene.⁵⁵

Several newspapers took a similar line and it is hard to think that there had not been off-the-record guidance from Downing Street. The *Daily Telegraph*’s political correspondent wrote: ‘There is general agreement [among MPs] that the motive is to put a powerful personality at the top of the BBC and thus exert a restraining influence on Sir Hugh Greene. Indeed bets were being taken last night on how long Sir Hugh would remain in the post ... By making Sir Hugh answerable to a chairman as authoritative as Lord Hill, with an unrivalled combination of broadcasting and political experience, the Prime Minister may feel he is putting the corporation’s nose out of

joint.’⁵⁶ The *Financial Times* commented that ‘Lord Hill has certainly not been appointed as a figurehead of the BBC and his appointment could mean a radical change in the function of the BBC chairman and much tighter control at the top’.⁵⁷ The *Mail*’s political editor, Walter Terry, recalled that Hill was given the ITA post by Macmillan ‘because he was a strong personality capable of knocking Independent Television into shape. He is being sent to the BBC by Mr Harold Wilson for roughly the same reason’.⁵⁸ *The Sun* claimed that “until now Sir Hugh Greene has been the real master of the BBC and the chairman has normally rubber-stamped decisions. But there is little doubt that Lord Hill will be the real power’.⁵⁹ In his memoirs Wilson devoted only one paragraph to the appointment but made a point of saying that as ITA Chairman Hill ‘had distinguished himself by the scrupulous fairness with which ... he had administered the Television Act in respect of comment on public affairs’.⁶⁰ The implication was that the BBC needed a similar approach and that Hill was put in to provide it.

It was later suggested that Wilson had first offered the BBC chairmanship to Bowden, who had declined it because he doubted his ability to ‘deal with that fellow Greene’. The source for this is Lusty. He had heard it from members of the Irish broadcasting authority who said they had been told it by Bowden (by now Lord Aylestone) himself.⁶¹ This at least supports the idea that Wilson wanted the next BBC Chairman ‘to deal with Greene’. Moreover, Bowden had been a Chief Whip, used to imposing discipline on an often unruly body. In the event Bowden succeeded Hill at the ITA. The other variation on the story is the claim by Edward Short, the Postmaster-General, that the choice of Hill came not from Wilson but from him. Short conceded that Wilson saw Hill as a disciplinarian who would put the BBC in its place but denied that it was intended by Wilson as anti-Greene move.⁶² Greene’s biographer suggests that Wilson’s quarrel was less with Greene than people lower down in the BBC. However, ‘Wilson realised that the only way to change the BBC was to suffocate Greene slowly by providing him with a Chairman with whom he could not work’.⁶³

If Wilson had hoped that Hill’s appointment would help to hasten Greene’s retirement this is broadly what happened. Although the two men tried to work together,

in Lusty's view there was 'never the slightest chance' that they could have done so for long 'in any sort of deep accord'. Hill had 'a profound suspicion of Hugh Greene and an almost total inability to understand him. Hugh Greene on the other hand ... was intellectually contemptuous of Hill and found him devious in his ways'.⁶⁴ As had been predicted Hill proved to be a forceful Chairman, very different from the self-effacing Normanbrook and Sir Arthur fforde, and where previously Greene had often been the 'voice' of the BBC that role was assumed by Hill. BBC employees normally retired at 60, which in Greene's case would have been in November 1970. But in May 1968 Greene wrote to Hill suggesting it was time for him to go and when Hill came up with the idea of easing Greene's retirement by appointing him a BBC governor, his appeal to Greene's vanity proved decisive. On 15 July Hill announced that Greene would retire on 31 March the following year.

If, however, Wilson had hoped that by appointing Hill he would make the BBC more biddable to the Labour government he was to be disillusioned. If anything relations between the government and the BBC became even worse. Hill proved to be as strong a defender of the BBC's independence as any of his predecessors, though he was not always able to curb those lower down in the BBC. The supposed disciplinarian found discipline hard to enforce and had to apologise to Wilson more often than he would have wished. Barely had Hill taken up his job before the BBC gave Wilson yet further cause for complaint. The Prime Minister had agreed to be interviewed in *Panorama* in September 1967 at the beginning of the Labour Party Conference. The interview was preceded by a 20-minute film about unemployment in Cumberland which was critical of the government and Wilson personally. From time to time the programme cut to Wilson watching the film. Wilson complained to Hill that the programme had been 'scandalously organised'. Even Crossman, who was convinced that Wilson had become paranoid about the BBC, thought he had been badly treated.⁶⁵ By way of balance, however, *Panorama* used the same technique of film plus interview with Heath three weeks later.

Early in 1968 John Silkin, the government Chief Whip, complained to the BBC about political comments in entertainment programmes which tended to denigrate the Prime Minister and his colleagues at a time when they and the country were in difficulties. Fox, now Controller of BBC1, said the criticism ignored the BBC's

constructive output. But Grist, who had succeeded Fox as head of the Current Affairs Group, said that while jokes about the Prime Minister accurately reflected the national mood it was time to lay off them, not for political reasons but because they were no longer funny.⁶⁶ The matter was also discussed by the Board of Management. It concluded that the flood of denigratory references to the Prime Minister in lighter radio and television programmes had become excessive and felt that the BBC was in danger of reflecting a cynical mood in the country as a whole.⁶⁷

One political joke, impugning Wilson's honesty, caused particular trouble. Originally used about the American President of the time, Lyndon Johnson, it went: 'How can you tell when Wilson is lying? If his lips are moving.' When it was first broadcast, on *At the Eleventh Hour*, on 13 January 1968, Whitley sent an apology to Silkin and an internal instruction was issued that the joke was not to be repeated. This was ignored and the joke featured on *The Rolf Harris Show* on 10 February. Silkin told Hill that Wilson was consulting his lawyers and wanted a public apology.⁶⁸ Hill's reaction was that while the joke was insulting, politicians had to take abuse and to broadcast an apology would only give the insult wider circulation. He went to see Wilson at the House of Commons and apparently convinced him that legal action against the BBC would be 'a nonsense'.⁶⁹

In September 1968, as Wilson was about to start his fifth year as Prime Minister, the radio programme, *The World This Weekend* carried an assessment. Of the five contributors only one, the journalist William Davis, unequivocally supported Wilson. Christopher Mayhew, a former member of the government, said Wilson was manipulative and had no convictions and the historian, Robert Blake, called him pragmatic rather than principled.⁷⁰ Wilson asked for redress the following weekend but did not get it.⁷¹ The bad feeling remained. After being given a two-minute ovation at the Labour Party Conference soon afterwards Wilson thanked the audience 'for what the BBC, if they are true to their usual form, will tonight describe as a hostile reception'. The BBC decided to broadcast the jibe without comment and while regretting 'further manifestations of the Prime Minister's seeming resentment and ill-will' the Board agreed with Hill that there was nothing to be gained from an overt reaction.⁷²

The World This Weekend aroused Wilson's ire again in February 1969. In an

item about Wilson's wish to see the new American President, Richard Nixon, the presenter, David Jessel, referred to 'suggestions in Washington about Mr Wilson's rather overt importuning from Downing Street'. In response to Wilson's complaint Hill said: 'Your strictures on the words "rather overt importuning" leave us defenceless' and senior staff responsible for the programme had recognised it as an error of judgment.⁷³ Later that month Nixon visited Britain. Instead of giving the bland commentary usual on such occasions, David Dimbleby chose to be irreverent and cynical. The BBC got its apology to Wilson even before Downing Street could complain. Charles Curran, who was shortly to take over from Greene, wrote: 'Dear Harold, Yet again the BBC had put its foot in it and badly.' An apology was issued to the press and included in news bulletins: 'The BBC greatly regrets that in the commentary made in connection with President Nixon's visit and transmitted live, there should have been included remarks which were unfortunate and inappropriate.' Wilson particularly objected to Dimbleby saying that he and Nixon had 'expensively-hired press secretaries whose job is to disguise the truth' and that he resented Nixon meeting Macmillan because he (Wilson) preferred to keep the limelight.⁷⁴

The retirement of Greene did nothing to improve relations. In October Wilson asked to appear on *Panorama* to mark the fifth anniversary of his government. No invitation came, though Heath was interviewed on the late night programme, *24 Hours*. In December Wilson again asked to go on *Panorama*, which was carrying a discussion on the war in Nigeria. Again he was refused, because it was in the middle of a Parliamentary debate. The BBC admitted it had been wrong to allow Heath to go on *24 Hours* during the debate on the Queen's Speech but did not want to compound the mistake. An angry Wilson summoned Hill to meet him on 9 December, the day after the *Panorama* broadcast. Their meeting, a record of which was kept by Downing Street, reveals how little common ground existed.⁷⁵ Wilson said he was utterly disheartened with his present relationship with the BBC and saw no way out. Hill found Wilson's comments very disturbing and did not believe there was any steady or consistent bias against the Prime Minister. On one point Hill may have agreed with Wilson, who said the bias did not come from him or Curran but from a lack of control over those lower down the line. As Hill later confided to his diary: 'I suspect that

whenever an instruction or request or guidance goes down from Broadcasting House, the instinctive reaction of Lime Grove [where the Current Affairs Group was based] is to do as little as possible to carry it out.’⁷⁶

Conclusion

Wilson’s feud with the BBC must be placed in the wider context of the conflicting interests of politicians and broadcasters, the one wanting to use the airwaves to put across their message, the other determined to resist political interference. Strains were inevitable, going back to the General Strike and, more recently, Suez. In the 1960s the BBC’s relations with Heath were often no better than with Wilson. The difference was that Wilson, more than any other previous Prime Minister, made a conscious attempt to exploit television and was angry when the BBC, in particular, seemed to stand in his way. He developed an obsession with the corporation and saw conspiracies where none existed. The BBC, for its part, was adopting a less deferential approach to politicians which spread from current affairs to satire and light entertainment. In doing so it often went beyond its own limits of acceptable behaviour and gave Wilson grounds for legitimate complaint. Even Hill, the strong Chairman, struggled to control people lower down. But as Normanbrook concluded over the confrontations, any subordination probably arose more from the desire to produce lively programmes than deliberate bias against the Wilson government.

Notes

1. Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The Authorised Life of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993), pp 143–44.
2. Martin Harrison, ‘Television and Radio’, in David Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p 128.
3. The figures, based on Audit Bureau of Circulation returns and a National Opinion Poll survey, are given in A. J. Beith, ‘The Press’, in Butler and King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London: Macmillan, 1965), p 197.
4. BBC WAC R9/35/13: Audience Research Listening and Viewing Barometer, 1 January to 31 December 1964.

5. Harold Wilson papers, box 1063: Wilson to Greene, 11 March 1964. The Wilson papers are held at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.
6. Ibid: Greene to Wilson, 16 March 1964.
7. Ibid: Greene to Bowden, 7 July 1964.
8. Ibid: Bowden to Greene, 9 July 1964.
9. Ibid: Normanbrook to Wilson, 23 July 1964.
10. Ibid.
11. BBC WAC R78/1568/1: Speech to Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference, 27 May 1963.
12. Wilson's view of Wood as an objective commentator did not last. In 1966 he had become so angry with Wood's coverage that he told Lord Thomson, the new proprietor of *The Times*, that he ought to sack him. Ziegler, op cit, p 267.
13. Wilson papers, box 1062: Wilson to Shulman, 23 July 1963. See also Shulman, *The Least Worst Television in the World* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), pp 26-33.
14. Shulman, op cit, p 33.
15. *The Times*, 4 October 1965.
16. Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: vol 2 Expansion and Change, 1958-68* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), p 177.
17. Lord Hill, 'Freedoms of the Communicators', speech to the Guild of British Newspaper Editors, 27 April 1968.
18. *Spectator*, 8 April 1966.
19. BBC WAC T6/513/1: Paper by Goldie, Head of Talks Group Television, 30 August 1963.
20. Ibid: News and Current Affairs, minutes on general election arrangements, 10 May 1963.
21. Ibid: News and Current Affairs meeting, 20 December 1963.
22. Wilson papers, box 1064: Committee on Party Political Broadcasting meeting, 25 February 1964.
23. Michael Cockerell, *Live From Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (2nd ed, London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p 103.
24. BBC WAC T16/514/1: News and Current Affairs meeting, 7 January 1966.

25. Wilson papers, box 1381: Note of a conversation between the Prime Minister and John Grist, 1 March 1966. The note was by Gerald Kaufman, Wilson's Parliamentary Press Liaison Officer, and ticked and initialled by Wilson.
26. Wilson papers, box 1064: Wilson to Heath, 3 March 1964.
27. Ibid: Wilson to Heath, 9 March 1966.
28. Ibid: Heath to Wilson, 17 March 1966; Wilson to Heath, 17 March 1966.
29. Wilson papers, box 1064: Kaufman's note of a phone conversation with Grist on 21 March 1966 and Wilson's reaction.
30. *The Guardian*, 2 April 1966.
31. BBC WAC R87/1825/1: 'Confrontations', Note by Oliver Whitley, 7 April 1966.
32. BBC WAC R78/1825/1: Normanbrook to Greene, 16 May 1966.
33. BBC WAC R143/56/1: Oral History transcript, Hugh Greene interviewed by Frank Gillard, 19 March 1977.
34. BBC WAC T16/139/2: Paul Fox to Grace Wyndham Goldie, Head of Talks and Current Affairs Group, 24 November 1964.
35. Ibid: Greene to Bowden, 25 November 1964.
36. BBC WAC R1/33/3: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 23 September 1965.
37. TNA: PRO PREM 13/141: Bowden to Greene, 23 September 1965.
38. The full text of the aide-mémoire is in Goldie, *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics 1936-76* (London: The Bodley Head, 1977), pp 341-42.
39. Goldie, op cit, pp 239-40.
40. TNA: PRO PREM 13/141: 'The government and the BBC', note by D. J. Mitchell, 30 September 1965.
41. Ibid: Greene to Bowden, 12 October 1965.
42. During the war he had worked with Greene on the BBC's broadcasts to Germany.
43. Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: vol 1 Minister of Housing 1964-66* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1975), p 329.
44. *Daily Mail*, 29 September 1965.
45. BBC WAC T16/514/1: News and Current Affairs meeting, 11 March 1966.
46. *The Times*, 7 April 1966.
47. Wilson papers box 1064: Kaufman to Fox, 22 March 1966.

48. BBC WAC R78/1825/1: 'Prime Minister's Allegations Against BBC', Note by Donald Edwards, 7 April 1966.
49. *Sunday Times*, 3 April 1966.
50. BBC WAC R78/1825/1: 'Prime Minister's Allegations Against the BBC', op cit.
51. BBC WAC R1/34/1: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 14 April 1966.
52. BBC WAC T16/514/2: Television Controllers meeting, 19 April 1966.
53. BBC WAC R78/1825/1: Normanbrook's confidential report of meeting with Wilson, 31 May 1966.
54. BBC WAC R143/54/1: Greene, Oral History interview, op cit.
55. Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister vol 2: Lord President of the Council and Leader of the Commons 1966-68* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1976), pp 444-45.
56. *Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 1967.
57. *Financial Times*, 27 July 1967.
58. *Daily Mail*, 27 July 1967.
59. *The Sun*, 27 July 1967.
60. Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-70: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1971), p 424.
61. Robert Lusty, 'Six Weeks That Shook the BBC', *New Statesman*, 6 September 1974, p 313.
62. Short in *Battles of Broadcasting*, BBC2, 11 October 1980.
63. Michael Tracey, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983), p 287.
64. Lusty, op cit, p 313.
65. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister vol 2*, op cit, p 493.
66. BBC WAC T16/157: Television Controllers' meeting, 23 January 1968.
67. Ibid: News and Current Affairs meeting, 26 January 1968.
68. BBC WAC R1/36/1: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 4 April 1968.
69. Lord Hill, *Behind the Screen: The Broadcasting Memoirs of Lord Hill of Luton* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974), pp 99-101.
70. TNA: PRO: PREM 13/3060 contains a transcript, presumably because Downing Street was upset by the item and asked for one.

71. Ibid: Comment by Wilson on a Chief Whip's minute, 14 January 1969.
72. BBC WAC R1/36/2: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 3 October 1968.
73. TNA: PRO PREM 13/2504: Hill to Wilson, 5 and 17 February 1969.
74. TNA: PRO PREM 13/2503: Curran to Wilson 26 February 1969; Wilson to Hill, same date.
75. TNA: PRO PREM 13/3060: Record of a discussion between the Prime Minister and Lord Hill, 9 December 1969.
76. Hill, *Behind the Screen*, op cit, p 154.

VI. PLAYING SAFE? LORD HILL AND THE BBC AFTER GREENE

This chapter assesses the extent to which Hugh Greene's BBC survived his departure and to address the perception, held both at the time and later, that under Lord Hill and Greene's successor, Charles Curran, the BBC became safer and less ambitious. Central to the argument is Hill himself, his concept of the role of Chairman and his philosophy of broadcasting. This in turn impacted on Curran. Finally, there will be an attempt to assess the impact of the Hill-Curran regime on BBC programmes.

Hill was the first BBC Chairman with direct experience of broadcasting, having been Chairman of the Independent Television Authority for the previous four years. Unlike previous chairmen, who had typically been diplomats and civil servants used to operating behind the scenes, Hill was a politician who had been an MP and Cabinet Minister and relished being in the public spotlight. One of his jobs in the Cabinet was looking after government propaganda. Moreover, he saw the role of chairman, whether at the ITA or BBC, as a much stronger one than either institution had hitherto experienced, with a consequent diminution of the status of the Director-General. Also, unlike several of his predecessors, he was not cast in an Establishment mould. His beginnings were humble and his progress from elementary school to Cambridge and the medical profession, before entering politics, was achieved on merit, not the advantage of birth. He was no intellectual, preferring to address problems with what he regarded as a bluff common sense. Nor was he a political ideologue. Although he served in a Conservative government, he stood for Parliament as a National Liberal and Conservative.

He was determined to run the BBC differently from his predecessors. Greene argued that it was essential to the smooth running of the organisation that the Director-General and Chairman had a relationship of mutual trust. This had been achieved with fforde and Normanbrook, helped by the geography of Broadcasting House. The offices of the Director-General and Chairman were on the third floor, separated only by the secretaries which they shared. Hill soon changed this. Instead of using BBC secretaries he brought with him the secretary who had served him for the past 20 years. He also disliked his office which 'resembled an oak-lined coffin, airless and sunless' and he

requested a more cheerful room, preferably adjacent to his secretary.¹ Hill denied that the intention was to change the relationship with the Director-General, but the move was resented by Greene as destroying the informal relations he had enjoyed with previous chairmen and Robert Lusty, Hill's Vice-Chairman, saw it as 'a deliberate, clever step in which to establish his [Hill's] authority'.²

Hill occupying a floor above Greene came to symbolise a fundamental redefinition of their roles. Hill's view was that starting with the dominant figure of Reith the pattern had been a strong Director-General and a weak Board. He went so far to claim that 'since Reith's days, the governors had for the most part been ciphers'.³ That was not Greene's view, though he did concede that throughout the BBC's history the Director-General had been 'the main spokesman of the corporation, the person known to the public as the personification of the BBC'.⁴ Under Hill there was no doubt who the spokesman was, or that under him the role of the governors was strengthened. As he put it: 'The Reith tradition of the board's unimportance had lasted too long, and although my predecessor [Normanbrook] had redefined the functions in terms which I wholly accepted, redefinition was one thing and application was another.'⁵ Hill was happy to be called an interventionist chairman: 'Providence did not construct me for a decorative role and I do not fit easily into the role of stooge.'⁶

Hill always insisted he was not trying to usurp management's prerogative but he saw his role as that of a government minister (the amateur) with the Director-General as a permanent secretary (the professional).⁷ The analogy is revealing of Hill's attitude but to Greene and Curran mistaken. Apart from the fact that a permanent secretary was not, unlike the Director-General, a public figure who had to justify his actions, it suggested that the BBC Board, like a government minister, made policy and the management, like civil servants, carried it out. One of Curran's main disagreements with Hill was over Hill's proposal that there should be a Deputy Director-General. Apart from his practical objections Curran argued that Hill was intervening in his (Curran's) sphere of operation.⁸ Sir Michael Swann, Hill's successor, saw his relationship with the Director-General in university terms, as one of chancellor to vice-chancellor, which Curran found easier.⁹

Hill also changed the way in which the Board operated. He set up a sub-committee under one of the governors, Sir Robert Bellinger, to scrutinise the BBC's finances and impose tighter financial control.¹⁰ For Greene this represented a further shift away from the primacy of management, with budgets and major financial schemes being presented to the Board by a governor instead of the Controller of Finance.¹¹ Hill's other innovation was to settle matters on which the Board disagreed by a vote. For Greene this was divisive. He recalled that under fford and Normanbrook votes were rarely taken. Instead the aim was to reach a consensus.¹² There is no doubt that Hill's emergence as a forceful Chairman tipped the balance of power from the Director-General to the Board, precipitating Greene's early retirement, and giving Curran a difficult three years until Hill himself retired.

Hill's philosophy of broadcasting emerged in a document, *Broadcasting and the Public Mood*. At a Board meeting in February 1968 the governors discussed allegations that BBC programmes were 'knocking' Britain. Hill thought it timely to consider the relationship between the mood of the country and the BBC. Greene, who was going abroad, asked Oliver Whitley, his chief assistant, to prepare a paper.¹³ According to Hill the first draft was 'beautifully written' but had more style than substance. It was modified but still lacked cogency. Eventually Hill himself rewrote it, though it was subtitled 'A Note From the Governors'. It was originally intended for higher and middle BBC staff but Hill decided to make it public.¹⁴ It appeared in July 1968, the month, ironically, in which Greene announced his retirement.

Broadcasting and the Public Mood outlined an approach to broadcasting significantly different from Greene's. Greene and Hill both emphasised that the BBC must act responsibly and have regard to the tolerance of its audience. Greene conceded that freedom was not 'total licence'. But it was better to err on the side of freedom than of restriction.¹⁵ For he wanted to encourage 'in an atmosphere of healthy scepticism' the examination of views and opinions which had been often been accepted too easily or too long. He wanted to stimulate creativity and encourage artists and writers whom some might consider 'too advanced' or even 'shocking' to take risks. Provocation could be healthy and indeed socially imperative. Broadcasters should engage with the times: 'I believe we have a duty to take account of the changes in society, to be ahead of

public opinion rather than always to wait upon it.'

Hill's approach in *Broadcasting and the Public Mood* was more cautious and measured. Public figures who agreed to be interviewed must expect penetrating and persistent questions. But they were entitled to courtesy and consideration and the BBC should not arouse hostility to itself when it reported or revealed the opinions of others. While the BBC should provide the conditions in which creative people could work, artists by their nature were in danger of offending and might shock for meretricious effect. The BBC had obligations to audiences and subjects as well as writers and these might occasionally involve limiting the artist's freedom. Television dramatists must have the opportunity to comment on our times but 'to allow the pessimistic and sordid to overwhelm our dramatic output would present an unbalanced view of the world and alienate the sympathy of our viewers'. Again, it was no part of the BBC's responsibility to appear to deride, or despise, or destroy, merely because they are traditional or conventional moral standards to which sections of the public were attracted. 'If we do not pursue a traditional line, we should not cultivate or appear to cultivate a "permissive" one.'

Hill may have been a traditionalist but he accepted that his tastes were not everyone's. Mary Whitehouse was shocked by *All My Loving*, a rock documentary by Tony Palmer featuring Jimi Hendrix. The film was originally shown on 3 November 1968 and when it was due to be repeated on 18 May 1969 she wrote to the BBC threatening a prosecution for obscenity. Hill's response was set out on a letter to Quintin Hogg, the politician and lawyer from whom Whitehouse had sought legal advice. Hill conceded that he found 'sweaty, gyrating and noisy performance like his repulsive; so, I imagine, do you. But that, it seems, is what pop music is about'. He did not think many viewers would regard it as obscene. Hill said their own concern was about the use of newsreel film to 'illustrate the violent society out of which pop music derives [sic] and in which it, in some ways, reflects'. But 'this was Mr Palmer's view of the world of pop, not mine, and as such was well informed, honest and thought provoking'.¹⁶ The letter shows Hill willing to reveal his personal distaste but prepared to see the wider picture.

It was against the background of Hill's determination to strengthen the authority of the Board, and with a philosophy of broadcasting more cautious than Greene's, that

Curran became Director-General in April 1969. Having to assert himself against a strong Chairman was only one of his handicaps. He came to the job with little background in programme-making and no direct experience of television. He first joined the BBC, after a history first at Cambridge and Army service, as a talks producer in radio, where he had worked on *Round Britain Quiz* and current affairs programmes. Seeing no prospect of advancement and dismayed at the poor salaries, he left to work on a weekly paper, *Fishing News*, but returned after a year. In 1953 he joined the administrative trainee scheme and from then on his BBC career was in administration. During the 1960s he was successively the BBC Secretary, a middle man between the Director-General and the Chairman, and Director of External Broadcasting. As Director-General Curran saw himself as a broadcasting manager, rather than a creative force, though he tried to encourage creativity in others.

One of Curran's jobs as Secretary was drafting speeches for Greene and he had an important input into the Rome speech. A passage in which Greene warned of the dangers of censorship was Curran's, so was the line about provocation being healthy.¹⁷ Indeed, Curran 'totally supported his [Greene's] liberal editorial view that there ought to be an openness of discussion, a readiness to take on difficulties in order to secure that openness'. But there was in Greene an element of mischief, the sense of wanting to cock a snook at society. When Curran became Director-General 'I knew that, as well as maintaining the liberties which had been achieved by Greene, I had somehow to moderate the element of excessive mischief'. He realised that the only way to do it was not by general command but by individual programme criticism. Otherwise he could have alienated staff and been accused of censorship. He also had to stay independent of the Board, which he feared might have given any hint of censoriousness a too enthusiastic backing.¹⁸ Although he agreed with Hill that the claims of audiences, subjects and artists must be balanced, Curran's view of broadcasting, as long as mischief was controlled, was probably nearer to Greene's than Hill's.¹⁹

When Curran's appointment was announced, he was little known outside the BBC and there were doubts whether he would be tough enough to stand up to Hill. On the BBC's own radio programme, *The World At One*, he was asked if he would be Hill's poodle. He replied that if he thought that he would not have accepted the job.²⁰

According to Hill, doubts about Curran's toughness and capacity to reach decisions were shared by the majority of governors, even those who thought him the best man for the job.²¹ Curran was aware that while Hill was a public figure, he was not and feared that whatever he (Curran) did good would be attributed to Hill and whatever he did wrong to him. More important, Curran felt that Hill found it difficult to distinguish between his (Curran's) function as chief executive and Hill's as Chairman. On three occasions Curran felt that Hill had so encroached on his territory that he had considered resigning as a matter of principle.²²

With Hill firmly established as the voice of the BBC and Curran feeling his way, there was a perception that the BBC was becoming more timid and cautious. The critic Milton Shulman argued that even as Greene retired in March 1969 'the determination of the BBC to include programmes that provoked and shocked was much less in evidence. A creeping conformity, a growing reluctance to cause trouble, a greater emphasis on light entertainment and sport on BBC1, were signs that the foundations of the Greene regime were being gnawed away by orthodox woodworm even before he was gone. The process accelerated with almost indecent speed once he had vacated his office and left the destinies of the BBC to ... Hill and ... Curran.'²³

In some areas the creative energy had spent itself before Greene retired. This was true of *Z Cars*, which in its original, innovative form, did not survive beyond 1965. Its spin-off series, *Softly Softly*, was conventional enough to win a family viewing award from Mary Whitehouse. The satire movement, too, had played itself out by the mid-1960s. Although the cancelling (by Greene) of *That Was the Week That Was* did not mean the end of such shows, its successors, *Not So Much a Programme, More a Way of Life* and *BBC3* did not have the same bite. Greene thought the death of satire shows was due chiefly to the lack of talent to produce them.²⁴ Peter Watkins did not work for the BBC again after *The War Game*.

Against that *The Wednesday Play*, which was renamed *Play For Today* in 1970, continued into the 1980s with no less an ability to challenge and shock. Dennis Potter was still an important contributor and his 1976 play, *Brimstone and Treacle*, banned by the BBC but only after it had gone into production, was evidence of a further attempt to push out the boundaries. *Days of Hope* (1975), a collaboration between the writer Jim

Allen and the director, Ken Loach, was a drama project notable not only for its size (four feature-length episodes) but for an uncompromisingly left-wing view of British history from the end of the First World War to the General Strike. As such it attracted criticism from the political right. The BBC defended the project, and though it wobbled over a repeat showing this eventually took place with Curran as one of its champions.²⁵ In its journalism, as the previous section demonstrated, the BBC remained resolutely independent of the politicians well after Greene's departure, probably offending the Wilson government under Hill and Curran more than it had done before.

There was, too, no timidity in the decision to bring back *Till Death Us Do Part*, one of the defining programmes of the Greene era. The first run had ended acrimoniously in 1968 with the writer, Johnny Speight, complaining of censorship and the BBC claiming that he was creatively exhausted. But by the middle of 1971 the BBC was keen to resurrect the series.²⁶ Speight was approached, said he was 'very excited' about the idea and set to work on the first script.²⁷ As before, however, Speight was late delivering and deadlines slipped. Duncan Wood, Head of Comedy, wrote to Speight in January saying they must have three completed scripts by 28 February and warning: 'The whole future of *Till Death* depends on this. The ball is now in your court'.²⁸

The BBC remained patient and the series began transmitting on 13 September, attracting 16 million people. But trouble was soon coming. The second episode contained a brief conversation about the birth of Christ in which Mike, the son-in-law, declared that Mary could not have been a virgin because God was the father of her son. Also, why had she conceived only one child? Was it because she was on the pill? Whitehouse wrote to Hill, describing the words as 'obscenely blasphemous and a calculated insult to a great many viewers'.²⁹ The BBC did not often support Whitehouse but both Kenneth Lamb, the Director of Public Affairs, and Huw Wheldon, the Managing Director of Television, agreed that the passage was likely to cause deep offence.³⁰ Bill Cotton, Head of Light Entertainment, the responsible department, said the passage should not have been transmitted.³¹ Cotton had made it a practice to watch each episode of *Till Death* before transmission but claimed that in this case the running order had been changed.³²

While acknowledging a lapse, the BBC continued to defend the series. Wheldon

wrote to one viewer that although the Virgin Mary sequence should not have been broadcast, ‘there is no question but that immense numbers of people of all kinds and opinions find this series hugely funny and hugely enjoyable’ and it was difficult to suppose that many, if any, switched on without a clear idea of the language and opinion they would hear.³³ Hill replied to Whitehouse in similar terms. The return of *Till Death* did not find the BBC any less prepared to back what was always likely to be a contentious series. The Virgin Mary episode did, however, highlight one problem of management which goes to the heart of the discussion about the Hill/Curran regime.

Because of the sheer volume of television production, it is impossible for the Board of Governors, or the Director-General, to control programmes in detail. Responsibility has to be delegated to producers, who are guided by the general philosophy of the BBC and must refer upwards in case of difficulty. Hill might want a more responsible approach to programme making and Curran to cut out ‘mischief’, but they had to rely on managers lower down the line. The Virgin Mary dialogue began with Speight, who was not going to be controlled by anyone. It must have been approved by Main Wilson, and above him, Wood, for the episode to have been made and transmitted, though if Cotton had seen it in advance (as he should have done) the offending dialogue would have been cut. Shulman’s perception that the arrival of Hill signalled ‘a creeping conformity, a growing reluctance to cause trouble’ may have confused the publicly declared intentions of those at the top of the BBC with the reality of programme making lower down, where journalism, drama and comedy could be just as challenging as during the Greene years.

Notes

1. Lord Hill, *Behind the Screen: The Broadcasting Memoirs of Lord Hill of Luton* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974), p 80.
2. Michael Tracey, *The Production of Political Television* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p 170.
3. Hill, op cit, p 106.
4. Tracey, op cit, p 173.
5. Hill, op cit, p 264.

6. Ibid: p 266.
7. Charles Curran, *A Seamless Robe: Broadcasting Philosophy and Practice* (London: Collins, 1979), p 333.
8. Ibid: pp 328-29.
9. Ibid: p 333.
10. Hill, op cit, pp 94-95.
11. Hugh Greene, 'And Faith, He'll Print It', *News Statesman*, 20 September 1974, p 383. This was a hostile review of Hill's book, *Behind the Screen*, op cit.
12. Ibid.
13. BBC WAC R1/36/1: Minutes of Board of Governors meeting, 8 February 1968.
14. Hill, op cit, pp 92-93.
15. These points are taken from Greene's speech, 'The Conscience of the Programme Director', delivered in Rome and reprinted in *The Listener*, 17 June 1965, pp 889-890. It represented the strongest statement of his libertarian approach.
16. National Viewers' and Listeners' Association Archives, Box 34: Hill to Hogg, 16 June 1969.
17. BBC WAC R143/30: Oral History Transcript, Charles Curran interviewed by Leonard Miall, January 1978. Curran had the speech in front of him during the interview.
18. Ibid.
19. Curran, in *BBC Yearbook 1970* (London: BBC, 1970), p 15.
20. *Evening Standard*, 8 August 1968.
21. Hill, op cit, p 105.
22. Curran, *A Seamless Robe*, op cit, p 332.
23. Shulman, *The Least Worst Television in the World* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973), p 103.
24. *Evening Standard*, 17 July 1968.
25. *The Guardian*, 1 October 1977.
26. BBC WAC T12/1421/1: Duncan Wood, Acting Head of Comedy, to Dennis Main Wilson (who had produced *Till Death*), 28 June 1971.
27. Ibid: Main Wilson to Michael Mills, Head of Comedy, 13 October 1971.
28. Ibid: Wood to Speight, 6 January 1972.

29. BBC WAC R78/2811/1: Whitehouse to Hill, 21 September 1972.
30. Ibid: Board of Management meeting, 25 September 1972.
31. Ibid: Television Weekly Programme Review meeting, 27 September 1972.
32. Bill Cotton, *Double Bill: 80 Years of Entertainment* (London; Fourth Estate, 2000), pp 152-53.
33. BBC WAC R78/2811/1: Wheldon to B. Rooke-Ley, 29 September 1972.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to establish how and to what extent the BBC engaged with the cultural revolution of the 1960s and how the corporation itself changed in the process. The Director-Generalship of Hugh Greene was placed at the heart of the project, partly because it spanned the decade for all but a few months, but also because Greene has been seen as the main architect of change. But his centrality and influence must be qualified.

First, the *Tonight* programme was starting to dispel the corporation's stuffy and paternalistic image before he took over. Furthermore, Greene's stewardship was not a homogeneous whole but can be divided into three distinct phases. In the first, from 1960 to 1962, his preoccupation was winning the BBC's case with the Pilkington Committee which he did by emphasising the corporation's traditional role as a public service broadcaster. Only after Pilkington's endorsement did he publicly align the BBC with the mood of the 1960s, advocating the sceptical examination of long-held opinions, encouraging risk-taking by artists and writers and urging broadcasters to take account of changes in society. His most forthright expression of this, the Rome speech, came mid way through this second period, between 1962 to 1967. Perhaps not coincidentally, these were the years of the greatest innovation and controversy, with programmes such as *That Was the Week That Was*, *The War Game*, *Up the Junction* and *Till Death Us Do Part*. The third phase, which started with the appointment of Lord Hill, saw Greene increasingly upstaged by a strong Chairman. It was his least effective time and some detected a more timid BBC even before he left.

A further question about Greene is whether, as he himself claimed in retrospect, he had a consistent vision from the start or whether, as Richard Hoggart has maintained, he was a pragmatist who responded to events. The two positions are not necessarily incompatible. As a journalist who had worked in Nazi Germany, and a man with a streak of mischief, Greene's instinct was for freedom of expression, subjecting hallowed ideas and institutions to scrutiny and even mockery and allowing creative people their head. Equally he had to be a realist, constrained by the Board of Governors on the one hand and government and public acceptability on the other. He claimed, probably correctly, to have enjoyed good relations with his first two Chairmen, Sir

Arthur fforde and Lord Normanbrook. But it was a fragile harmony and Greene's decision to kill *That Was the Week That Was* was in large part prompted by the threat of resignations from the board. The decision not to show *The War Game* was taken principally by Normanbrook, though with Greene's agreement. It may have been influenced by security implications though the evidence does not support a conspiracy. In his Rome speech Greene said broadcasters should be ahead of public opinion rather than always wait upon it. But he was happy to invoke public opinion to dismiss both Mary Whitehouse's campaign and those who accused *The Black and White Minstrel Show* of demeaning black people.

While Greene may have created the climate for creativity and experiment he did not initiate programmes. This is crucial to understanding how the BBC worked and how change was managed. Programme ideas came 'from below', from writers, producers and film-makers. The impetus for challenging the way the BBC did things came from such figures as Donald Baverstock, Ned Sherrin, Ken Russell (all of whom were active in the corporation before Greene took over), Ken Loach, Peter Watkins and Johnny Speight. But their initiatives had to be negotiated and were subject to compromise and concession as they passed through the BBC's decision-making process, sometimes reaching as far as Greene and the Board. *That Was the Week That Was* was initially encouraged but eventually killed, mainly because traditional control mechanisms proved impossible to enforce. *The War Game* was made but not shown, *Up the Junction* shown but not repeated. BBC management tended to be a brake on change and the attitude of Baverstock as a manager was far more measured than that of the freewheeling iconoclast who produced *Tonight*. This was not the unbridled permissiveness as portrayed by critics of the BBC such as Whitehouse. Furthermore, much of the BBC's output throughout the 1960s remained conventional and uncontroversial. *Dixon of Dock Green* continued to project a reassuring view of the police and coverage of the Royal Family tended to marginalise criticism and reinforce the status of the monarchy.

All the same the BBC did engage with the changing attitudes in society which support the claim of a cultural revolution, whether in *That Was the Week That Was* with its mockery of politicians and other public figures, the examination of contemporary social issues in *Z Cars* and *The Wednesday Play* and Speight's use of

situation comedy to confront race prejudice. In the process many of the BBC's traditional practices were swept away. The Green Book was finally discarded. BBC journalism became less deferential and more probing, one of the reasons for the feud with Harold Wilson. Russell and Watkins tore up the rules for documentary and *The Wednesday Play*, though the great majority of its productions were uncontentious, undermined the BBC's commitment to objectivity by taking a stand on controversial questions such as capital punishment, homelessness and abortion.

According to Gramscian theory, the dominant class maintains its hegemony through negotiation and concession. The BBC may have fitted this model in the past, for instance by making limited concessions to popular taste during the Second World War, but still being seen as part of the Establishment long after it. The conclusion of this thesis is that the BBC which Greene left as Director-General in 1969 was fundamentally different from the institution he took over nine years before. Despite the more cautious approach of Hill and Greene's successor, Charles Curran, those who created the programmes ensured that the changes of the 1960s were deep and lasting.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARCHIVAL AND UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENT SOURCES

BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham

policy files

Clean-Up TV Campaign: T16/585; correspondence T16/699

Commercial Television: T36/31; audience research T16/301

Drama: T16/62

Jokes: T16/157

Light entertainment: T16/91/1-2

Moral Rearmament: R34/801, R34/1099, R78/1412, R78/1503

National Viewers' and Listeners' Association: T23/162

Pilkington Committee: T16/326-29; oral evidence R4/44; documents R4/49;
correspondence R4/51

Police: T16/577

Political broadcasts: general T16/139; 1964 general election T6/513; 1966 general
election T16/514

Race relations: T16/175/2

Royal family: T16/186

That Was the Week That Was: T16/589;

The War Game: T16/679

The Wednesday Play: T16/373

programme files

The Black and White Minstrel Show: general R78/1921; individual programmes
T12/845-52

Comedy Playhouse: T12/933

Culloden: general T32/515; casting T32/1162; correspondence T32/1164

Dixon of Dock Green: general T12/779, T12/1349

Monitor: general T32/937; contributors T32/933
Pop Goes the Easel: T32/1021

Prokofiev: T32/1001
Elgar: T32/1033
Bartok: T32/1072
The Debussy Film: T32/1095

Royal Family : general T56/248; correspondence T56/337; reviews T56/342

That Was the Week That Was: general T32/1649; individual programmes T32/1650-66; correspondence T32/1647, T16/726

Till Death Us Do Part: general T12/1321-2, R78/2811, T12/1421; individual programmes T32/1650-66; correspondence T16/727

Tonight: T32/1850-57, T32/1668-75; correspondence T16/728

The War Game: general T56/261-66, T16/748, R78/2620; script T16/681; Phelps dossier S251 Box 8; correspondence T16/731

The Wednesday Play: general T5/695

For the West: T5/1398

Up the Junction: T5/681; correspondence T16/730

Cathy Come Home: T5/965-67, R78/1919; correspondence T16/695

Where the Buffalo Roam: R78/1919

Z Cars: general T5/2506, T5/710; correspondence T16/734

'The Big Catch': T5/2448

'Friday Night': T5/2449

'People's Property': T5/2455

'Information Received': T5/2462

'Happy Families': T5/2495

'A Place of Safety': T5/2511

BBC Sound Archives Oral History Project:

transcripts of interviews with:

Richard Cawston: R143/23 (1980)

Charles Curran: R143/30 (1978)

Hugh Greene: R143/56/1 (1977)

Ian Jacob: R143/93/1 (1976)

Huw Wheldon: R143/133/2 (1978)

Grace Wyndham Goldie: R143/139 (1978-79)

personal files

Johnny Speight: T48/541; RCont 18

Peter Watkins: T41/506

Harold Wilson: R78/1825

miscellaneous

Audience Research: Listening and Viewing Barometer: R9/35/5 (1956) to R9/35/13 (1964) etc

Board of Governors minutes: R1/30/1 1962; R1/31/1 January-June 1963; R1/31/2 July-December 1963; R1/32/1: January-June 1964; R1/32/2: July-December

1964; R1/33/3 September-December 1965; R1/34/1 January-April 1966; R1/34/2 May-July 1966; R1/34/3 September-December 1966; R1/35/1 January-June 1967; R1/35/2 July-December 1967; R1/36/1 January-June 1968; R1/36/2 July-December 1968; R1/37/1 January-June 1969

Charles Curran: lectures, articles and speeches R78/1574-75

Hugh Greene: lectures, articles and speeches R87/1565-73

Lord Hill: lectures, articles and speeches: R78/1563-66

The National Archives, Kew

[CAB: files relating to Cabinet minutes and committees; PREM: files relating to the Prime Minister's Office; HO: Home Office files]

That Was the Week That Was: PREM 11/3368

The War Game: CAB 21/5808; PREM 13/139; HO 303/22; HO 322/203

Harold Wilson and the BBC: PREM 13/140; PREM 13/141; PREM 13/515; PREM 13/435; PREM 13/2503; PREM 13/2504; PREM 13/2506; PREM 13/3060

British Film Institute, London

BECTU History Project: audiotaped interviews with:

Gilchrist Calder (1992)
Rudolph Cartier (1991)
Dennis Main Wilson (1991)
Sydney Newman (1990)
Allan Prior (1994)
Johnny Speight (1990)
Shaun Sutton (1992).

Cooke, Lez, *Troy Kennedy Martin: Form and Politics in TV Drama* (unpublished thesis for MA in Film Studies, Polytechnic of Central London, 1986).

Tracey, Michael, and David E. Morrison, *The Jericho People: Mary Whitehouse and the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association* (unpublished typescript, late 1970s).

Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Modern Political Papers Collection

Harold Wilson papers

The Albert Sloman Library, University of Essex

Archives of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVALA)

PUBLISHED DOCUMENT SOURCES

Report of the Committee on Broadcasting 1960 [Pilkington Report] Cmnd. 1753
(London: Stationery Office, 1962).

White Paper on Broadcasting, Cmnd. 1770, July 1962.

White Paper on Broadcasting, Cmnd. 1893, December 1962

White Paper on Broadcasting, Cmnd. 3169, November 1966.

NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

Ariel

Birmingham Mail

Birmingham Post

Church of England Newspaper

Daily Express

Daily Herald

Daily Mail

Daily Mirror

Daily Sketch

Daily Telegraph

Financial Times

Evening News (London)

Evening Standard

Glasgow Herald

The Guardian

The Independent

The Listener

Liverpool Echo

Melody Maker

Municipal and Public Services Journal

News Chronicle

New Society

New Statesman

Nuneaton Evening Tribune

The Observer

Radio Times

Reynolds News

South Wales Echo and Evening Express

South Wales Evening Post

Spectator

Sunday Mail (Glasgow)

The Sun

Sunday Telegraph

Sunday Times

The Times

The Times Literary Supplement

TV Times

Tribune

Weekly News (Manchester)

Yorkshire Evening News

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, MEMOIRS AND DIARIES

Attenborough, David, *Life on Air* (London: BBC Books, 2002).

Barry, Michael, *From the Palace to the Grove* (London: Royal Television Society, 1992).

Beadle, Gerald, *Television: a Critical Review* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963).

Bridson, D. G., *Prospero and Ariel: The Rise and Fall of Radio* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971).

Caulfield, Max, *Mary Whitehouse* (London and Oxford: A. R. Mowbray, 1975).

Clark, Kenneth, *The Other Half: A Self-Portrait* (London: John Murray, 1977).

Cotton, Bill, *Double Bill: 80 Years of Entertainment* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000).

Crossman, Richard, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: vol 1 Minister of Housing 1964-66* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1975).

Crossman, Richard, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: vol 2: Lord President of the Council and Leader of the Commons 1966-68* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1976).

Day, Robin, *Grand Inquisitor* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988).

Dilks, David, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-45* (London: Cassell, 1971).

Dougall, Robert, *In and Out of the Box* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1973).

Frost, David, *An Autobiography Part 1: From Congregations to Audiences* (London: HarperCollins, 1993).

Hill, Charles, *Behind the Screen: The Broadcasting Memoirs of Lord Hill of Luton* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1974).

Hoggart, Richard, *An Imagined Life. Life and Times vol III: 1959-91* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992).

Michelmores, Cliff, and Jean Metcalfe, *Two-Way Story* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986).

Milne, Alasdair, *DG: The Memoirs of a British Broadcaster* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988).

Muir, Frank, *A Kentish Lad* (London: Bantam Press, 1997).

Russell, Ken, *A British Picture: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1989).

Sherrin, Ned, *A Small Thing - Like an Earthquake* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

Speight, Johnny, *It Stands to Reason* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973).

- Warner, Jack, *Jack of All Trades* (London: W. H. Allen, 1975).
- Whitehouse, Mary, *Quite Contrary: an Autobiography* (London; Sidgwick and Jackson, 1993).
- Whicker, Alan, *Within Whicker's World* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1982).
- Willis, Ted, *Evening All: Fifty Years Over a Hot Typewriter* (London: Macmillan, 1991).
- Wilson, Harold, *The Labour Government 1964-70: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph, 1971).

BIOGRAPHIES

- Bergan, Ronald, *Beyond the Fringe ... and Beyond: a Critical Biography of Alan Bennett, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller and Dudley Moore* (London: Virgin Books, 1989).
- Carpenter, Humphrey, *Dennis Potter* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).
- Ferris, Paul, *Sir Huge: the Biography of Huw Wheldon* (London: Michael Joseph, 1990).
- Heffer, Simon, *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).
- Howat, Gerald, *Learie Constantine* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975).
- Pimlott, Ben, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins), 1992.
- Richardson, Charles, *From Churchill's Secret Circle to the BBC: The Biography of Lt Gen Sir Ian Jacob* (London: Brassey's, 1991).
- Sherry, Norman, *The Life of Graham Greene, vol I, 1904-39* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989).
- Secrest, Meryle, *Kenneth Clark: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984).
- Sisman, Adam, *A. J. P. Taylor: A Biography* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).
- Thorpe, D. R., *Alec Douglas-Home* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996).
- Taraborrelli, J. Randy, *Call Her Miss Ross: The Unauthorised Biography of Diana Ross* (London: Pan Books, 1991).
- Tracey, Michael, *A Variety of Lives: A Biography of Sir Hugh Greene* (London: The Bodley Head, 1983).
- Ziegler, Philip, *Wilson: The Authorised Life of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993).

BOOKS

- Aldgate, Anthony, and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* rev ed (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).
- Bakewell, Joan, and Nicholas Garnham, *The New Priesthood: British Television Today* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1970).
- Baxter, John, *An Appalling Talent: Ken Russell* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973).
- Bennett, Alan, Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, Dudley Moore, *The Complete Beyond the Fringe* (London: Methuen, 1987).
- Bevins, Reginald, *The Greasy Pole: A Personal Account of the Realities of British Politics* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965).
- Bignell, Jonathan, Stephen Lacey and Madeleine MacMurrough-Kavanagh, eds, *British Television Drama: Past, Present, Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000).
- Bignell, Jonathan, *An Introduction to Television Studies* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- Black, Peter, *The Biggest Aspidistra in the World* (London: BBC, 1972).
- Black, Peter, *The Mirror in the Corner* (London: Hutchinson, 1972).
- Booker, Christopher, *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Collins, 1969).
- Brandt, George, ed, *British Television Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- Briggs, Asa, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: vol II - The Golden Age of Wireless* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- Briggs, Asa, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: vol IV - Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
- Briggs, Asa, *Governing the BBC* (London: BBC, 1979).
- Briggs, Asa, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- Briggs, Asa, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: vol V - Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- Butler, David, and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan, 1960).
- Byrne, Paul, *The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).
- Campey, George, *The BBC Book of That Was the Week That Was* (London: BBC, 1963).
- Carpenter, Humphrey, *That Was Satire That Was: The Satire Boom of the 1960s* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000).

- Caughie, John, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Clark, Kenneth, *Civilisation: A Personal View* (London: BBC and John Murray, 1969).
- Cockerell, Michael, *Live from Number 10: The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television* (2nd ed, London: Faber and Faber, 1989).
- Cook, Jim, ed, *BFI Dossier no 17: Television Sitcom* (London: British Film Institute, 1982).
- Cook, John. R., *Dennis Potter: A Life on Screen* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).
- Cooke, Lez, *British Television Drama: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2003).
- Corner, John, ed, *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: British Film Institute, 1991).
- Curran, Charles, *A Seamless Robe: Broadcasting Philosophy and Practice* (London: Collins, 1979).
- Curran, James, and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (5th ed, London: Routledge, 1997).
- Daniels, Therese, and Jane Gerson, eds, *The Colour Black: Black Images in British Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1989).
- Day-Lewis, Sean, *Talk of Drama: Views of the Television Dramatists Now and Then* (Luton: Luton University Press, 1998).
- Fiddy, Dick, *Missing Believed Wiped: Searching for the Lost Treasures of British Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).
- Frost, David, and Ned Sherrin, eds, *That Was the Week That Was* (London: W. H. Allen, 1963).
- Fuller, Graham, ed, *Loach on Loach* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).
- Goldie, Grace Wyndham, *Facing the Nation: Television and Politics, 1936-1976* (London: Bodley Head, 1977).
- Gomez, Joseph, *Ken Russell: The Adaptor as Creator* (London: Frederick Muller, 1976).
- Gomez, Joseph, *Peter Watkins* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979).
- Goodwin, Andrew, Paul Kerr and Ian Macdonald, eds, *Drama-Documentary*. BFI Dossier no 19 (London: British Film Institute, 1983).
- Greene, Hugh, *The Third Floor Front: A View of Broadcasting in the Sixties* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969).
- Halsey, A. H., with Josephine Webb, eds, *Twentieth-Century British Social Trends* (3rd ed, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

- Hewison, Robert, *Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75* (London: Methuen, 1986).
- Hill, John, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-63* (London: British Film Institute, 1986).
- Hoggart, Richard, *Speaking to Each Other. vol I: About Society* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992).
- Hood, Stuart, *A Survey of Television* (London: William Heinemann, 1967).
- Hood, Stuart, *Stuart Hood on Television* (London: Pluto Press, 1983; 1st ed 1980).
- Jacobs, Jason, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Lacey, Stephen, *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- Laing, Stuart, *Representations of Working-Class Life, 1957-64* (London: Macmillan, 1986).
- Leigh, Jason, *The Cinema of Ken Loach: Art in the Service of the People* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002).
- McCann, Graham, *Dad's Army: The Story of a Classic Television Show* (London: Fourth Estate, 2004).
- MacInnes, Colin, *Sweet Saturday Night: Pop Song 1840-1920* (London: Panther, 1969).
- McKnight, George, *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: The Films of Ken Loach* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1997).
- Madden, Paul, ed, *British Television Drama 1959-1973* (London: British Film Institute, 1976).
- Marland, Michael, ed, *Z Cars: Four Television Scripts* (London: Longmans, 1968).
- Marwick, Arthur, *British Society Since 1945* (2nd ed, London: Penguin Books, 1990).
- Marwick, Arthur, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Miall, Leonard, *Inside the BBC: British Broadcasting Characters* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994).
- Minnion, John, and Philip Bolsover, eds, *The CND Story* (London: Allison and Busby, 1983).
- Moonman, J. R. H., *A History of the Church in England* (3rd ed, London: A & C Black, 1973).
- Murphy, Robert, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

- Nathan, David, *The Laughtermakers: A Quest for Comedy* (London: Peter Owen, 1971).
- Nordlinger, Eric A., *The Working Class Tories* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1967).
- O'Connor, Alan, ed, *Raymond Williams on Television* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- Phillips, Mike, and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998).
- Pimlott, Ben, *The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy* (2nd ed, London: HarperCollins, 2002).
- Pines, Jim, ed, *Black and White in Colour: Black People in British Television since 1936* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).
- Prebble, John, *Culloden* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961).
- Prior, Allan, *Script to Screen: From Z Cars to The Charmer* (St Albans: Ver Books, 1996).
- Purser, Philip, *Done Viewing* (London: Quartet Books, 1992).
- Richards, Jeffrey, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).
- Russell, Ken, *Fire Over England: The British Cinema Comes Under Friendly Fire* (London: Hutchinson, 1993).
- Sampson, Anthony, *Anatomy of Britain* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962).
- Sendall, Bernard, *Independent Television in Britain, vol 1: Origin and Foundation, 1946-62* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
- Sendall, Bernard, *Independent Television in Britain, vol 2: Expansion and Change, 1958-68* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- Shubik, Irene, *Play For Today* (2nd ed, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
- Shulman, Milton, *The Least Worst Television in the World* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1973).
- Silvey, Robert, *Who's Listening? The Story of BBC Audience Research* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977).
- Smith, Leonard, *Half Decade: An Inside Story* (London: Associated-Rediffusion, 1961).
- Spraos, John, *The Decline of the Cinema: An Economist's Report* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962).
- Sydney-Smith, Susan, *Beyond Dixon of Dock Green: Early British Police Series* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).

- Taylor, John Russell, *Anger and After: A Guide to the New British Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963).
- Toll, Robert C., *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
- Tracey, Michael, *The Production of Political Television* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).
- Tracey, Michael, and David E. Morrison, *Whitehouse* (London: Macmillan, 1979).
- Tracey, Michael, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Walker, Alexander, *Hollywood England: The British Film Industry in the Sixties* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974).
- Watkins, Gordon, ed, *Tonight*, BFI Dossier no 15 (London: British Film Institute, 1982).
- Welsh, James M., *Peter Watkins: A Guide to References and Sources* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986).
- Wheen, Francis, *The Sixties: A Fresh Look at the Decade of Change* (London: Century, 1982).
- Wheen, Francis, *Television* (London: Century Publishing, 1985).
- Wheldon, Huw, ed, *Monitor* (London: Macdonald, 1962).
- Whitaker, Ben, *The Police* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964).
- Whitehouse, Mary, *Cleaning Up TV* (London: Blandford Press, 1967).
- Whitehouse, Mary, *'Who Does She Think She Is?'* (revised ed, London: New English Library, 1972).
- Williams, Marcia, *Inside No 10* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972).
- Williams, Raymond, *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974).
- Wilmot, Roger, *From Fringe to Flying Circus: Celebrating a Unique Generation of Comedy, 1960-80* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980).
- Worsley, T. C., *Television: The Ephemeral Art* (London: Alan Ross, 1970).

ARTICLES, CHAPTERS AND LECTURES

- Adam, Kenneth, 'Takeover at the BBC', *Sunday Times*, 9 March 1969; 'Decline and Fall at the BBC', *ibid*, 16 March 1969; 'How BBC TV Fought Back', *ibid*, 23 March 1969; 'The BBC in Danger', *ibid*, 30 March 1969.
- Attenborough, David, 'BBC2', BBC Lunch-time lectures, fourth series no 6, 16 March 1966.

- Beith, A. J., 'The Press', in David Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1964* (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp 185-203.
- Buscombe, Edward, 'The Workings of British Television', *Screen Education*, no 27 (Summer 1978), pp 68-72.
- Buscombe, Edward, 'Broadcasting From Above', *Screen Education*, no 37 (Winter 1980/81), pp 73-78.
- Casey, Albert, 'Blood Without Thunder', *Screen Education*, no 16 (September/October 1962), pp 25-27.
- Chapman, James, 'The BBC and the Censorship of *The War Game* (1965)', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol 41 no 1 (January 2006), pp 75-94.
- Cook, John R., 'The Last Battle: Peter Watkins on DVD', *Film International* 1 (2003:1), pp 54-57.
- Cook, John R., "'Between Grierson and Barnum"; Sydney Newman and the Development of the Single Television Play at the BBC, 1963-67', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol 1 no 2 (2004), pp 211-55.
- Cull, Nicholas J., 'Peter Watkins's *Culloden* and the Alternative Form in Historical Filmmaking', *Film International* 1 (2003:1), pp 48-53.
- Fairlie, Henry, 'The BBC', in Hugh Thomas, ed, *The Establishment: a Symposium* (London: Ace Books, 1962), pp 175-192.
- fforde, Sir Arthur, 'What is Broadcasting About?' (1963), privately printed.
- Fox, Paul, 'This is BBC1', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, seventh series no 4, 19 February 1969.
- Freedman, Des, 'Modernising the BBC: Wilson's Government and Television, 1964-66', *Contemporary British History*, vol 15 no 1 (Spring 2001), pp 21-40.
- Gardner, Carl, and John Wyver, 'The Single Play: From Reithian Reverence to Cost-Accounting and Censorship', *Screen*, vol 24 no 4-5 (July-October 1983), pp 114-124.
- Greene, Hugh, interview with Kenneth Harris, *Observer*, March 22, 1964 (reprinted in Harris, *Conversations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), pp 96-107.
- Greene, Hugh, 'The BBC Since 1958', *BBC Handbook* 1969, pp 10-12.
- Greene, Hugh, 'The Future of Broadcasting in Britain', Granada Guildhall Lecture 1972 (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1972).
- Harrison, Martin, 'Television and Radio', in David Butler and Anthony King, *The British General Election of 1966* (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp 125-48.
- Hill Derek, 'and the Next *Tonight* ... ?' *Contrast*, vol 1, no 1 (Autumn 1961), pp. 67-73.
- Kennedy Martin, Troy, 'Nats Go Home: First Statement of a New Drama for Television', *Encore*, vol 1 no 2 (March-April 1964), pp 21-33.

- Kennedy Martin, Troy, 'Up the Junction and After', *Contrast*, vol 4, nos 5/6 (Winter 1965/Spring 1966), pp 137-41.
- Laing, Stuart, 'Banging in Some Reality: The Original Z Cars', in John Corner, ed, *Popular Television in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), pp 125-44.
- Lewis, Peter, 'Z Cars', *Contrast*, vol 1 no 4 (Summer 1962), pp 307-315.
- Lusty, Robert, 'Six Weeks That Shook the BBC', *New Statesman*, September 6, 1974, pp 309-313.
- McGrath, John, 'Better a Bad Night in Bootle', *Theatre Quarterly*, vol v no 196 (September-November 1975), pp 39-54.
- McGrath, John, 'TV Drama: The Case Against Naturalism', *Sight and Sound*, vol 46 no 2 (Spring 1977), pp 100-105.
- MacMurrough-Kavanagh, M. K., 'The BBC Wednesday Play, 1964-70: Researching and Interpreting a Formative Moment in British Television Drama', *Media Education Journal*, no 23 (Winter 1997/98), pp 10-14.
- MacMurrough-Kavanagh, M. K., 'The BBC and the Birth of "The Wednesday Play", 1962-66: Institutional Containment Versus "Agitational Contemporaneity"', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 17, no, 3 (1997), pp 367-81.
- MacMurrough-Kavanagh, M. K., "'Drama" into "News": Strategies of Intervention in "The Wednesday Play"', *Screen*, vol 38 no 3 (Autumn 1997), pp 247-259.
- MacMurrough-Kavanagh, M. K., 'Boys on Top: Gender and Authorship on the BBC Wednesday Play 1964-70', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 21 no. 3 (May 1999), pp 409-25.
- Milland, Jeffrey, 'Courting Malvolio: The Background to the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting, 1960-62', *Contemporary British History*, vol 18 no 2 (Summer 2004), pp 76-102.
- Muir, Frank., 'Comedy in Television', BBC Lunchtime Lectures Fifth Series - 3, December 14, 1966.
- Murphy, Patrick, 'The War Game - the Controversy', *Film International*, no 3 (2003), pp 25-28.
- Pickering, Michael, 'White Skin, Black Masks: "Nigger Minstrelsy" in Victorian England', in J. S. Bratton, ed, *Music Hall: Performance and Style* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1986). pp 70-91.
- Pickering, Michael, 'The BBC's Kentucky Minstrels, 1933-50: Blackface Entertainment on British Radio', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol 16, no 2 (1996), pp 161-187.
- Prior, Allan, and John Hopkins, 'Writers Talking about Z Cars', *Screen Education*, no 21 (September/October 1963), pp 8-21.
- Robinson, David, 'Monitor in Profile', *Sight and Sound*, vol 30 no 1 (Winter 1960-61), pp 41-43.

- Samuel, Raphael, 'London Calling: The BBC from Savoy Hill to Shepherd's Bush'. *The Times Literary Supplement*, March 8, 1996, p 14.
- Silvey, Robert, 'The Measurement of Audiences', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, fourth series no 4, 12 January 1966.
- Sutton, Shaun, 'The Theatre in the Living Room', BBC Lunch-time lectures, eight series no 1, 30 October 1969.
- Richards, Jeffrey, 'The Thin Blue Line: *The Blue Lamp*', in Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).
- Robinson, David, 'Year of the New Brooms', *Contrast*, vol 1, no 4, Summer 1962, pp 240-249.
- Rowland, Robert, 'Panorama in the Sixties', in Aldgate, Anthony, James Chapman and Arthur Marwick, eds, *Windows on the Sixties; Exploring Key Texts of Media and Culture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp 154-82.
- Scannell, Paddy, 'Public Service Broadcasting in Britain: the History of a Concept', in Andrew Goodwin and Garry Whannel, eds, *Understanding Television* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp 11-29.
- Sloan, Tom, 'Television Light Entertainment', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, eighth Series - 2, 11 December, 1969.
- Swann, Sir Michael, 'The Responsibility of the Governors', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, ninth series no 1, 29 October 1973.
- Tracey, Michael, 'The Retiring of Hugh Greene', in *The Production of Political Television* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp 157-181.
- Tracey, Michael, 'A Nightmare Vision that Shook the BBC', *The Guardian*, 1 September 1980.
- Welsh, James. M., 'The Modern Apocalypse: *The War Game*', *The Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol 11, no 1 (Spring 1983), pp 25-41.
- Wheldon, Huw, 'Television and the Arts', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, third series no 3, 9 December 1964.
- Wheldon, Huw, 'The Achievement of Television', BBC Lunch-time Lectures, ninth series no 5, 11 February 1975.